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INDIAN HANDCRAFT PAMPHLETS 000

BLACKFEET CRAFTS

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INDIAN HANDCRAFTS • 9

BLACKFEET CRAFTS

JOHN C. EWERS

Curator, Museum of the Plains Indian
Browning, Montana

UNITED STATES INDIAN SERVICE

[p.3]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This book is dedicated to the more than a score of elderly Blackfeet Indians of the United States and Canada who have furnished valuable information on the Blackfeet arts and crafts of their youth. This information has not only served to check statements previously published, but it has supplied a considerable amount of material on Blackfeet arts and crafts hitherto not reported in print. To a very large extent this booklet is based on field research. Its preparation would have been impossible without the kindly assistance and interest of these older Indians.

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Illustrations through the courtesy of:

(A) American Museum of Natural History, New York City.
(G) Glacier Studio, Browning, Montana.
(P) Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
(W) University of Washington Museum, Seattle.
(CW) Clark Wissler, New York City.
(R) K. F. Raahen, Billings, Montana.
(MC) Walter McClintock, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.*
(USIS) United States Indian Service.
(O) William C. Orchard, New York City.

*This map is adapted from one in The Old North Trail by Walter McClintock and used with his permission. This map was also used in Ewers' "Story of the Blackfeet" and an acknowledgement inadvertantly omitted.

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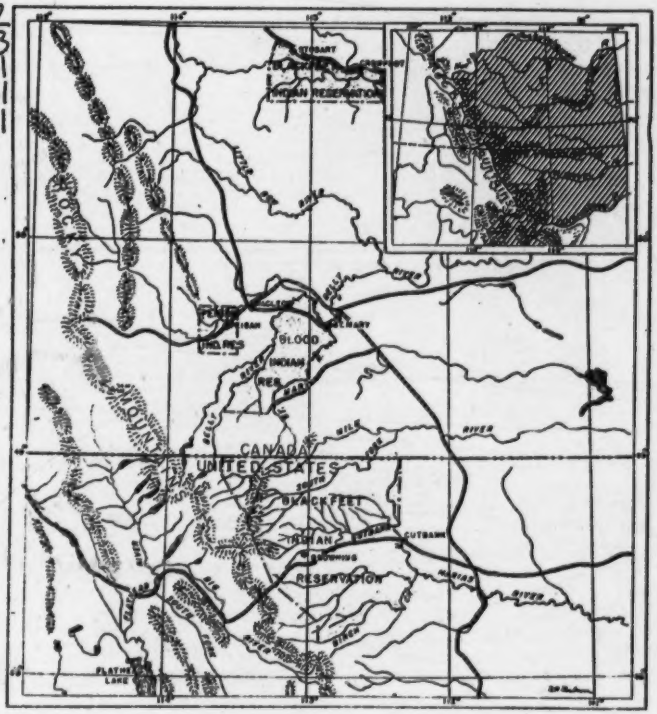

2. Present reservations and former range of the three Blackfoot tribes

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THE BLACKFEET INDIANS
WARRIORS AND CRAFTSMEN

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On the grassy plains of southern Alberta and northern Montana, near the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains, live the Blackfeet Indians. Today, they number more than 7,000 persons, on three separate reserves in Canada and the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. Ever since they have been known to White people, the Blackfeet have comprised three tribes—the Piegan, the Blood, and the North Blackfeet. Although these tribes spoke the same language, practised the same customs, were friendly and often went to war together against their common enemies, they were politically independent. They were typical, nomadic Plains Indians, dependent for a livelihood upon the great herds of buffalo that darkened the broad expanses of their country until they were exterminated in the years preceding 1884. Their life was attuned to a hunting existence. It was a life of movement, for they followed the buffalo herds. Their villages were composed of portable, skin-covered lodges that could be quickly dismantled and easily transported to new and distant localities. The acquisition of horses by the Blackfeet early in the eighteenth century increased their mobility and made hunting less arduous.

175
648
[181]

In the early history of the Northwestern Plains the Blackfeet figured primarily as warriors. They were not only the most numerous and powerful Indian people of the region, but they were the most aggressive. Through a hundred years of conquest prior to the mid-nineteenth century the Blackfeet drove back their enemies until they were able to lay claim to a vast area east of the Rockies, extending from the North Saskatchewan River in Canada to the present Yellowstone Park. For a quarter of a cen-

[131]

[P.9-A]

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tury, in the early part of the nineteenth century, the active hostility of the Blackfeet prevented American fur traders from trapping and from developing the Indian trade in Montana east of the mountains. Until the middle 1880's the Blackfeet continued to send out raiding parties in quest of horses to the camps of enemy tribes west of the Rockies, and to those living southward and eastward on the plains. Rarely did these war parties return empty handed. Their constant aggressive action made the Blackfeet feared by all their enemies, White as well as Indian. They were the warriors par excellence of the Northwestern Plains.

However, it is not only as men of action that the Blackfeet are worthy of our interest. They have also earned a reputation in more peaceful pursuits—as skilled artists and craftsmen. Descriptions of the Blackfeet by early fur traders and explorers tell us of their love for ornamenting their native costumes and equipment with simple but colorful and attractive designs, of their painstaking care in manufacturing even the most common household objects with the most primitive of tools, and of their ingenuity in utilizing native materials in their decorative arts. Early in the historic period they learned to adapt some of the European-made materials from the traders' stores to use in their arts and crafts. Despite the alien origin of these materials, the Blackfeet employed them in a traditionally Indian manner.

The observations of early writers are confirmed by the appearances of old objects of Blackfeet make in museum collections. Yet, if we would try to understand the significance of the decorative arts in Blackfeet life, we must not be content to see

[P.9-B]

them only as static, sharply outlined, raw colored articles in electrically lighted museum cases. We must picture them in use among the hardy, restless, mobile Indians living in the bright sunlight of the open plains. In motion in the out-of-doors the outlines seem to become less harsh. In brilliant sunlight, and against bright blue sky, the intense colors seem very appropiate. 121

The arts and crafts of the Blackfeet, generally, were similar to those of neighboring Indian tribes. Nevertheless, differences in detail gave to most of them a distinct tribal character. [171]

THE FOUR MAJOR CRAFTS

The primitive Blackfeet who hunted the wandering buffalo on the Northwestern Plains required material for clothing and shelter that would stand hard wear and could be transported easily in compact bundles. They found that the skins of the larger animals of their country—the buffalo, deer, elk, antelope and mountain sheep—admirably met these conditions. Lodge covers of buffalo cow skins could be folded tightly, packed on travois, and moved from one temporary camping place to another. Skin clothing not only wore well, and could be transported easily, but it was warm enough to afford protection against the bitter, sub-zero cold of northern winters. Containers of tough, durable, rainproof rawhide or soft dressed skins made excellent storage and packing cases. Consequently, articles made of animal skins comprised a large and important part of the meagre possessions of the nomadic Blackfeet. The four major crafts of the Blackfeet are concerned primarily with the manufacture and ornamentation of articles fashioned from animal skins. These are the crafts of skin preparation and sewing, painting, quillwork and beadwork. 237 [136] [493] [132] [415]

SKIN PREPARATION AND SEWING

Although men were the hunters, the preparation of animal skins was women's work. 281 462

[P·10-A]

Very hard work it was too. It took a sturdy, industrious woman to dress all of the hides required by a family. Indeed, the need for many helping hands in this difficult task has been cited as one of the reasons why successful hunters usually took several wives. 281 462 [595]

Skin Dressing

The dressing of a buffalo hide involved a series of simple processes. Fragments of tissue and fat mixed with blood still adhered to the inner side of a buffalo hide after skinning. The woman's first task was to remove this matter by a process known as fleshing. She stretched the hide out on the ground, hair side down, and drove lodge pins through it at intervals around the edge to hold it in place. She knelt on her knees over the hide and hacked away the undesired matter with short, vigorous blows of a sharp-toothed, fleshing tool held in her right hand. (See figure 3a) 281 [412]

3a. Fleshing. Removing tissue and fat

Then, after the hide had cured and bleached in the sun a few days, she took an adze-like tool and scraped the inner surface of the hide to an even thickness. She stood on the hide, leaned over, and chipped away the surface by moving her sharp-bladed tool much as a skilled carpenter uses a plane. When she was satisfied that the inner surface of the hide was smooth and even, she turned it over and removed the hair from the outside with this same tool. Some women preferred to take the hair off with blows from a rock instead of with the scraping [412] [412]

[P.10-B]

tool. (See the description of parfleche making on pages 16-17). However, if the hide was to be used for a robe the hair was left intact. (See figure 3b) 281 [412]

3b. Scraping, to obtain even thickness

If the hide was to be made into rawhide articles, such as packing cases, saddle covers, moccasin soles, or ropes, this completed its preparation.

If the hide was to be soft tanned, further steps were necessary. The woman rubbed an oily mixture of animal brains, fat and liver into the hide with her hands. (See figure [237]

3c. Tanning. Rubbing with brains and fat

3c). Then she worked it over with a smooth stone, the heat from which further distributed the oil through the hide. The hide was placed in the sun to dry, then saturated with warm water and rolled into a bundle. By this time the hide had shrunk in size, and it became necessary for the woman to stretch it by pulling with her hands and feet. (See figure 3d).

[P. 11-A]

3d. Stretching

Finally, the skin was softened by breaking down the tissues through rubbing the surface vigorously with a rough stone (See figure 3e) and sawing it back and forth through a loop of twisted rawhide tied to

3e. Softening. Rubbing the surface

[P. 11-B]

the under side of an inclined lodge pole. (See figure 3f). The soft tanned hide was then ready for use. 281

3f. Softening. Breaking down tissues

Buffalo hides were heavy, bulky objects for a woman to handle. Often the hide was cut in two down the center from head to tail to make dressing easier, and sewed together again after it was completely dressed. Usually this was not done if the worker was certain the hide was to be used for a robe.

The skins of animals of the deer family were dressed like those of buffalo, except that after the oil was worked into the skin, the hair side was rubbed with a rib-bone beaming tool to be sure that all the fine hairs were removed. [412]

Women who were industrious and skillful skin dressers were very proud of their achievements. Girls were taught that ability in this work helped to attract a desirable husband. Older women spoke with pride of the number of skin lodges they had made, much as the successful warrior boasted of his deeds of valor. 281 555

Smoking of Skins

Skins to be used for making clothing usually were smoked after they had been dressed. This smoking enabled them to dry soft and pliant after the garments had been exposed to rain or snow. The smoky odor that 281 294 [751]

[P 12-A]

permeated the skins for a long time after they were smoked also was considered a means of repelling mosquitos and moths. 281 294 [151]

The Blackfeet smokehouse for skins was a simple structure built in the open. First a round hole was dug in the ground about a foot in depth and more than two feet in diameter. Over and around the hole was built a framework of arched willow sticks, their ends driven into the ground. When finished, the structure looked much like the typical Blackfeet sweatlodge. A large fire was built a short distance from the smokehouse. After sage and rotten cottonwood were placed in the hole, the largest coals were taken from the fire, thrown into the 281 349 [824] [824]

281 412

4. Scraper and flesher employed in skin dressing.

hole and covered with leaves. The fire inside the structure emitted very little flame but a great deal of smoke. Then the skins to be smoked were stretched, hair side inward, over the willow framework and pinned together so as to allow little room for the escape of smoke from the interior. A second layer of skins was placed over the dome-shaped structure. A woman carefully watched the smoking hides. When the top skins became very hot it was time to examine 281 349 281

[P.12-B]

those underneath. If she found them a rich, yellow-brown in color she knew they were thoroughly smoked. Care was taken that the skins did not smoke too long and become too dark in color. Usually it required a half day or longer to smoke skins by this method. 281

Although many Blackfeet preferred white skins for their dress clothing, the smoked ones generally were used for their undecorated, everyday garments, since these skins were more serviceable. 294

Keeping Skins Clean

Clothes were kept clean by rubbing them from time to time with native clay. White clay was used on the white skins, a yellow clay on the smoked ones. The clay was moistened with water and rubbed over the surface of the skin garments. Then the whole garment was rubbed briskly with a bone or rock and hung up to dry. Dirt, grease, grass, and other stains that discolored the skins were thus removed and the original white or yellow-brown color restored. The method was much the same as that employed by modern people in cleaning white shoes. In place of white clay, a native stone, known as selenite, was sometimes used for cleaning white skins. Pieces of it were burned in the fire until they turned white, then ground to a powder before use. Little pieces of selenite were placed with clothes of skin to repel moths when the garments were folded and packed in rawhide or soft skin cases or bags for storage or transportation. Sometimes braids of sweetgrass were placed with the clothes to give them a pleasant odor when they were unpacked. 296 [823] [237] 296 823 [824]

Sewing Skins

The Blackfeet used animal sinew for thread in sewing skins. Broad bands of sinew were cut from the legs and neck of the buffalo or animals of the deer family. When thread was needed shreds were pulled off with the teeth, softened in water or in the mouth, smoothed with the fingers, and twisted by holding one end in the mouth and rolling the sinew between the palms of the hands. Sinew made a tough, strong, durable 294 283

[P.13-A]

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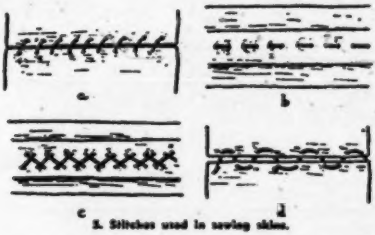

296 ←
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5. Stitches used in sewing skins.

thread. No needles were used in sewing. Instead, the sinew thread was passed through holes punched in the skins with a sharp pointed bone awl. Four stitches used by the Blackfeet in sewing skins are illustrated in figure 5. Stitch A, the over and over stitch, was generally used for all seams and for joining moccasin soles to uppers. Stitch B, the running stitch, was employed for attaching borders and bands to a second, underlying piece of skin. Stitch C was a mending stitch, and D was used chiefly for ornament.

294 [283] [412] [296]

In the careful piecing together of ten to twenty or more buffalo skins to form a lodge cover, and in the making of men's shirts and women's dresses from two deer, antelope, or elk skins carefully cut and pieced together, Blackfeet women exhibited their skill as seamstresses. Often they sought to conceal unsightly, exposed construction

281 294 [342] [531]

412
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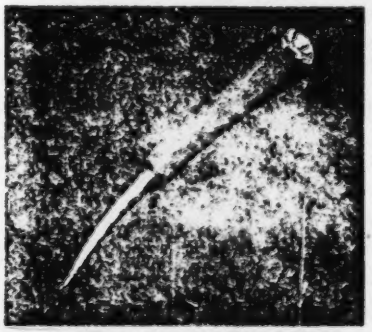

6. Bone awl used in sewing skins.

[P.13-B]

joints of garments or containers by covering them with bands of decoration in beadwork or quillwork, or adding an ornamental skin fringe. This way of hiding the seams is demonstrated in the decoration of men's dress shirts made by the Blackfeet. Invariably, the long sleeve seams of the shirts are covered with decorated bands of ornamentation. (See illustration on page 47.)

The preparation of skins, and their manufacture into useful articles were laborious, time-consuming, even monotonous women's tasks. But they were very necessary ones for the Blackfeet. Most White people are inclined to overlook work in skins in favor of the more colorful and striking decorative arts of painting, quillwork and beadwork. It is not so with Indians. They are quick to notice and approve a finely dressed skin of soft, even texture and color, or a well made skin article. They are quick to reject a poorly dressed skin or a careless piece of sewing. Of the four major crafts, work in skins was certainly of basic importance. Women who were especially skilled in this work had a right to be proud of their ability.

PAINTING

Next to the dressing and sewing of skins, painting is probably the oldest of the major Blackfeet arts or crafts. Certainly it dates back to prehistoric times. Early traders and explorers found the Blackfeet living in painted lodges and wearing painted buffalo robes. The materials used in painting were readily obtained in the Blackfeet country.

Paints

Native paints were both numerous and ingenious. They were derived from animal, vegetable and mineral sources. Earth paints were most common. The Blackfeet employed a half-dozen different reds, providing colors of several hues and intensities. Red paints were prepared from crimson colored earth, and crushed, pale, reddish-yellow rock. A reddish brown was obtained by baking a gray or yellowish clay over ashes until it turned red. In the spring of the year the

buds of the pussy willow were picked, kept over night, and made into still another red paint. Yellow was found in the form of colored earth especially common beside the Yellowstone River. Buffalo gall stones provided another yellow. For blue they used a duck manure from the lakes of their country where wild ducks were plentiful. It was dried in the sun and then mixed with water. Old full-bloods still are inclined to use the same color names for both blue and green, although they readily recognize the difference between the two colors on sight and affirm that their people used them both in their painting in the old days. They say green came from a colored mud or from plants growing near lakes. Some say Blackfeet also knew how to mix native blue and yellow to make green. White paint was obtained from white earth. Lewis and Clark named the present Beaver Creek near Helena, which they passed in 1805, White Earth Creek, because they learned that the Indians were accustomed to dig white paint beside that stream. Both charcoal and black earth furnished black paint.

Of all colors, red was most commonly used in painting by the Blackfeet. Red earth was applied liberally to the surfaces of sacred objects used in ceremonials. Blackfeet ceremonial bundles usually contain numerous sacred objects completely covered with red paint.

The trader, Alexander Henry, listed ten different pigments employed by the Piegan division of the Blackfeet in "painting and daubing their garments, bodies and faces" in the early years of the nineteenth century. It is possible that some of these were colors obtained from the traders even at that early date. Certainly in more recent times commercial paints have replaced native colors to a very large extent in Blackfeet painting.

Preparation of Paints

The native pigments were ground to a powder in small stone mortars. Each color was kept separately in a skin bag closed at the neck by a buckskin drawstring. In use,

[P.14-B]

the paints were mixed with hot water in a clam shell cup, or mixed with the glue extracted from boiling in water the tail of a beaver or the white, clean underscrapings from a hide. 386 [415] [237]

Painting Tools

In addition to paints of different colors, the Blackfeet artist's kit contained a number of straight, peeled, willow sticks of different lengths which served as rulers in marking or painting straight lines on rawhide or soft skin. Some outfits also included one or more flattened sticks for marking lines on a hide by pressure alone, before paint was applied. Every outfit had a number of bone paint brushes for applying the color. These brushes were cut from the porous edge of a buffalo shoulder blade or the end of a buffalo hip bone. The honeycomb composition of the brushes enabled them to hold the paint and permitted it to flow rather smoothly onto the surface of the rawhide or soft skin. Some of these brushes were pointed for painting fine lines, others were rounded for spreading color over larger areas. The sides of the bone brushes also 413 [824] [237]

[P-15-A]

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were used for filling in the larger masses. A separate brush was employed for each color. 413

Articles Painted

Articles usually decorated with painted designs by the Blackfeet were parfleches (folded, envelope-like, rectangular packing cases, sometimes called "Indian suitcases"), other rectangular folded cases, tubular cases, shields, and drum heads—all of rawhide. Thick rawhide knife sheaths were sometimes painted. Soft skin robes, men's shirts and leggings, lodge linings and lodge covers were often painted. Some objects of wood, such as the tripods supporting the back-rests used inside lodges, arrow shafts, war clubs, and dance paraphernalia also were painted. 531

Men's Painting and Women's Paintings

As a general rule women were the painters of geometric designs on rawhide cases, robes and lodge linings; men used human and animal forms and painted the devices on their shields and drums, the religious symbols on their lodge covers, and covered their robes with picture writing extolling their deeds of braver, in war. 531 532 [555] [212]

[P. 15-B]

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413
415
237

[R15-C]

7. Bone point broken and a point base.

531
415

3. Parfleche painted in 1904.

their robes with picture writing extolling 000
their deeds of bravery in war.

Rawhide Painting

One of the most common objects painted 415
by women was the parfleche. These most [531]
useful storage and carrying cases usually
were made in pairs. They were transported [492]
on horseback. One parfleche was suspend- [283]
ed lengthwise of the horse at each side, by
rawhide cords passing through burnt holes
in the margins of the cases and over the
pommel and cantle of the packsaddle. The
contents of these heavy rawhide cases re-
mained dry even when travelling in the
hardest rain.

To make a pair of parfleches a woman 281
selected a buffalo hide with the hair on, [531]
whose inner side had been fleshed and [532]

[P-16-A]

scraped to an even thickness. She soaked the hide in water and, while it was still damp, pegged it out on the ground hair side down. She knelt over the hide on her knees and began to paint on a portion of it the design composition she had in mind. She measured the lengths of the lines outlining the desired motives precisely with peeled willow sticks of different lengths. Using these sticks as rulers she drew the outlines of the forms with paint on a bone brush. Usually a single color was used for outlining all painted forms on the parfleche. Then she filled in the larger areas of the composition with other desired colors. The paint was mixed only with hot water, which caused it to sink into the damp hide and become permanently fixed after it had dried.

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[P.16-B] 9. Painted parfleche.

Another method of parfleche painting, said to have been favored by Mrs. Little Spotted Calf, a well known Blackfeet artist of more than 50 years ago, was somewhat different. She first outlined the forms with paint mixed with water, using willow sticks for straight edges. Then she filled in the outlined areas with paint, or had young people do it for her. Meanwhile the tail of a beaver was boiling in water nearby until it made a sticky glue. She took another bone brush with no paint on it, dipped it in the glue, marked along the painted areas with it, and finally covered all the painted masses with a thin coat of the glue. The glue made the paint shine and remain permanent. One could pour water over it after the glue dried and the paint would not run. The clean second scrapings of hides were sometimes substituted for the beaver tail in making the glue overcoat. It is said that after the Blackfeet obtained rice from the Whites, they made a sticky glue of it that furnished another substitute for beaver tail glue.

In either case, after the paint dried, the hide was turned over and the hair removed with a hide scraper or a rock. Pounding the outside of the hide with a rock made the unpainted portions of the rawhide a whitish color. Then the woman cut out the parfleches to the desired shape with a knife, folded them into their proper envelope form, and burned out the tie holes with a hot iron rod. The parfleches were finished.

Areas of the hide not needed for parfleches were not wasted. They were used for making smaller painted cases of rectangular shape, or cut up into moccasin soles.

Blackfeet parfleches average 2 feet long by 15 inches wide when folded for use. They are somewhat shorter than those of most other Plains tribes. In the old days they were used primarily for holding pemmican or dried meat. The painted designs are confined primarily to the two end flaps, secondarily to the longer, narrower, side flaps. In contrast with some other tribes, such as the Dakota, Blackfeet parfleches generally

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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19. Fringed case for sacred objects.

have proportionately large areas of unpainted hide on the top flaps. A considerable range of angular designs appear on Blackfeet parfleches, selected and combined in accordance with the preference of the maker. Some Blackfeet parfleche designs make use of a few curved lines also. Old parfleches made with willow measuring sticks generally bear designs less straight in outline than those made in more recent years with the aid of a ruler.

The parfleche pictured in figure 8 bears an old Blackfeet design. All forms are outlined in blue. The masses of color are

(P. 17-B)

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77. Case for a berry masher.

in green, red and yellow. Although this specimen was made since 1900, the pattern was recognized by an elderly woman to be exactly the same as the one she often used in painting parfleches when she was a young woman, prior to 1880.

A number of smaller, rectangular cases were made by the Blackfeet from a single piece of rawhide and painted by the same methods as were parfleches. As a rule these cases were folded twice, stitched up the sides, and closed by triangular flap over the top. The flap was fastened by a rawhide cord passing through holes in the front of the case and tied. Some of these cases were used to hold sacred medicine objects. They frequently had long, pendant rawhide fringes at the sides. Others, without fringes, often contained such common household articles as skin dressing tools or stone headed berry mashers. These cases were painted only on the broad front side with a panel of geometric design. Many of the fringed medicine cases in museum collections or in the homes of the older Indians today have become so worn through use and exposure to all kinds of weather that the painted designs are barely recognizable.

Another rawhide case, painted in a simi-

[P.18-A]

lar monner by the Blackfeet, looks like a tapering tube. Its ends are closed by two rawhide disks, tied to the cyclinder by rawhide cords passing through holes burnt in the margins of cylinder and disks. The larger cases of this type generally have long rawhide fringes suspended from the long edge of the tube where it is fastened together. The painted decoration of a tubular case is confined to a long panel covering one side of the case only, and to the end disks. The segment of the cylinder generally hidden from view of the spectator is left unpainted. The designs painted on these cases vary in detail, but mo have three main elements—a rhombus between two triangles touching at their apeces. This form is commonly called a medicine case. The Blackfeet used it to hold and protect carefully wrapped, fragile, feather bonnets, or other ceremonial objects.

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12. Case for a feather bonnet.

[P.18-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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[P. 19-A]

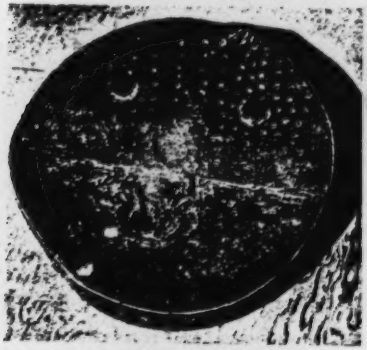
13. Painted buffalo hide shield.

The antiquity of parfleches and other painted rawhide containers is in doubt. Descriptions of the Blackfeet written prior to the fourth decade of the nineteenth century do not mention them. Yet Maximilian's account of these people in 1833, mentions "many kinds of painted parchment bags" then in use. It is possible that the Blackfeet did not make them at all before they acquired horses, and that prior to that time containers were of lighter, soft dressed skins, in the form of drawstring bags, such as were widely used by the neighboring Plains Cree in more recent times.

Since the extermination of the buffalo the Blackfeet have made rawhide cases after traditional patterns from cowhide. Because they are so useful for storing small articles, some parfleches are still in use among the older Blackfeet.

Men's painting on rawhide was confined primarily to the decoration of shields and drum heads. Shields were made from the thick hide of the buffalo bull's neck, shrunken over a fire in the ground, and trimmed into a circular form about 18 inches in diameter. The paintings on shields represent the buffalo, the sun, the moon or

[P.19-B]



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14. Painted ceremonial drum.

stars. They were symbolic medicine paintings intended to protect the shield owner in war. An old Blackfeet shield bearing a single crude painting of a buffalo in red is shown in figure 13. As was customary, a fringe of eagle feathers surrounds the rawhide body of the shield. Symbolic paintings were also made on the heads of drums used in ceremonials, such as the drum from a medicine pipe bundle bearing the claws of the thunder bird and dots symbolizing hail shown in figure 14. Horse and deer hides were preferred for drum heads.

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Painting on Soft Skins

Women also painted geometric patterns on the soft tanned inner surfaces of buffalo robes. Generally the robes were spread out on the ground, hair side down. Some women used one or the other of the two methods of applying the paint to robes explained in our description of parfleche painting, while others employed a third method. The outlines of the painted forms were pressed firmly into the soft surface of the hide with a flattened stick marking tool, drawn along the edge of a willow stick ruler. Then the bone paint brushes were used to paint in the designs with a mixture of paint, water, and glue from the second scrapings of a hide.

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At one time Blackfeet women may have painted other geometric patterns on buffalo

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[P.20-A]

robes, but the only one elderly blackfeet can remember, and the only one common in museum collections, is the pattern the Indians term "marked robe" or "real painted robe." It is a very simple pattern consisting o' five or more equally spaced, narrow, parallel lines of decoration running lengthwise of the robe. These lines were usually broken at intervals into rectangular blocks of different colors. Either men or women wore these robes. The pattern was first mentioned by Maximilian in 1833. Elkskin robes bearing this pattern are still worn by Blackfeet medicine women in the annual Sun Dance ceremony. Older Indians say the pattern had no symbolic meaning; it was just a design that appealed to the Blackfeet.

531 294 [175] [178]

The large, buffalo skin draft screens that lined the lower portions of Blackfeet lodges were painted with bright geometric designs by women. The painting was confined to a long, narrow horizontal band near the top of the lining, and additional vertical bands projecting downward from it at intervals of about 15 inches. Simple as this pattern was it was distinctly Blackfeet.

531 [353]

Some men, who had fine war records, preferred to paint pictographic representations of their deeds of valor on their lodge linings.

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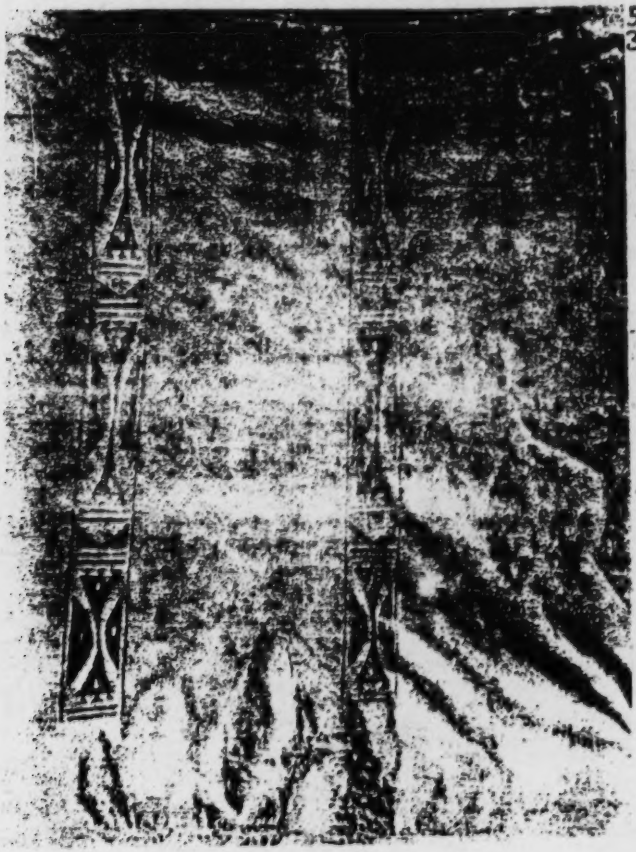
15. "Marked robe" of cowhide.

[P.20-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6



16. Section of a painted lodge lining.

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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[P.22-A]

17. A warrior's robe, painted about 1865-1870

Even though a renowned warrior owned a "marked robe," he preferred to wear a robe on which was pictured his successful encounters with the enemy and symbolic of his leadership in war. War history robes were always painted by men. Either the wearer decorated his own robe or he secured the services of a more skillful painter to do it for him. In painting war history robes, only hot water was mixed with the paint and the figures were made freehand with a bone brush. The figures on Blackfeet robes are generally more notable for their informative than for their aesthetic quality. Compared with the semi-realistic, decorative figures painted by Cheyenne and Teton Dakota artists during the latter part of the nineteenth century, most Blackfeet figures are but crude suggestions of living forms, human or animal. Some Blackfeet men painted the figures in outline, others in solid monochrome. The paintings comprise a series of representations of events, scattered over the surface of the robe without any effort to devise an orderly composition. Blackfeet work is more properly termed picture writing than art. However, this simple pictorial shorthand served adequately to tell other Indians,

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18. Some common symbols used in painting war records. 1. Enemy camp (tripods represent lodges). 2. Enemy war party intrenched in a hole. 3. Three methods of representing the taking of a picketed horse from an enemy camp. 4. Horse taken in an open fight. 5. Trade blanket taken from an enemy. 6. Gun taken from an enemy. 7. Bow taken from an enemy. 8. Quiver taken from an enemy. 9. Shield taken from an enemy. 10. Two ways of showing an enemy killed. 11. Enemy's scalp taken. 12. Our hero served as leader of a war party. 13. Hero served as war party scout.

[P-22-B]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 24-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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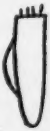

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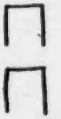

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19. Four pictographic signatures. Left to right, Rides at the Door, Weasel Tail, Takes a Gun, and Chasing Black Bears.
(p. 24-A)

familiar with the language of the painted figures, exactly what the brave man's claims to distinction were. It indicated, with great economy of line, the number of horses he had stolen from enemy camps on each war party, the number of enemy weapons or other valuable personal equipment he had taken, the number of the enemy he had killed or wounded, the number of times he had served in the responsible position of leader of a war party or as a scout. Some of the common symbols of this pictorial shorthand are shown in figure 18. 532 555 212

Another valuable symbol was the pictographic signature which served to identify the individual Indian by name. The lone Indian when separated from his war party or his camp could draw his signature, coupled with other pictographs indicating his recent actions, and a small arrow indicating his direction of movement, on a rock, a piece of bone, skin or cloth and leave it in a conspicuous place where others of his tribe might find it and learn of his past accomplishments and future plans. A few pictographic signatures of well known elderly Indians of the Blackfeet Reservation, Montana, are shown in figure 19. 532 212

The most remarkable and awe-inspiring of Blackfeet paintings are the larger than life size murals of animals painted on the conical outer walls of their lodge covers. 532 531

(P. 24-B)

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

The painted lodges of the Blackfeet were first mentioned by Alexander Henry, the fur trader, in 1809, who stated that both beasts and birds were represented in the paintings and that buffalo and bear were frequently delineated. Painted, canvas-covered lodges may still be seen in the circle camp at sun dance time. Photographs of Blackfeet lodges taken a half century ago suggest that little or no change in these figures has taken place in the last fifty years. It is possible that some of the animal figures may be represented today just as they were in Henry's time or even earlier.

The paintings on Blackfeet lodges are no mere decorations. To the Indian who is versed in the traditions of his people, each painting is as replete with religious symbolism as is a madonna in a stained glass church window to the pious Christian. For each painted lodge there is a fascinating legend of origin relating how its first human owner obtained it. Many painted lodges, according to these legends, were given to their first Blackfeet owners in dreams or visions. Such a dream was a stirring religious experience. In it the original animal owner of the lodge appeared to the sleeper and promised to give him his own painted lodge and other sacred objects which were the sources of his supernatural power. The animal instructed the man how to paint the

[P.24-C]

lodge and to make up the other sacred objects associated with it. When he awoke the man proceeded to follow these instructions. Thus each painted lodge is not an entity in itself but part of a complex of religious objects belonging to its owner. The owner has certain rituals to perform and taboos to recognize so long as he is in possession of these sacred objects. When he sells his painted lodge to another an elaborate transfer ritual must be performed. Painted lodges have been and still are frequently transferred from one owner to another within or among the three Blackfeet tribes. Only the rightful owner is permitted to make use of the animal figures that belong to his lodge. No other man would dare copy them.

When a painted lodge cover became old and worn the paintings on it were transferred to a new one. This was generally in

[P·25-A]

the fall of the year, just after new lodge covers were made. A man first called upon the owner of a lodge and told him of his desire to transfer the decoration to a new cover. The owner in turn called upon someone in the camp who was known to be a skilled artist and asked him to help. When all was in readiness, the new lodge cover erected and stretched into shape around the lodge poles, the painting began. The former owner instructed the artist exactly how to mark out the animal figures on the lodge cover, and the artist proceeded to draw the outline of the forms in black earth paint, using red willowsticks for rulers and a bone paint brush. This outlining was done while the lodge was standing, and the old, worn, painted lodge, which was to be discarded stood nearby where the size and arrangement of its paintings could be referred to if [P. 25-B]

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[824]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 26-A]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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(P 25-C)

28. Painting the cover of the eagle lodge, about 1910.

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21. Eagle painted lodge in 1943.

need be. The outlining of the forms was the only part of lodge painting that required the services of the most able artist obtainable. 532

The new lodge cover was then taken down and spread out flat on the ground. The owner invited a group of people of good reputation for honesty and industry to his lodge and gave them a smoke. They proceeded to help him finish the painting. They used a buffalo tail or a handful of long buffalo hair to apply the paint to the larger masses. The paint was mixed with hot water only, and rubbed onto the cover with considerable pressure. When the painting was finished and the new lodge erected, all the ornaments that hung on the old lodge were transferred to the new one by its owner. Then he invited the owners of other painted lodges in the camp to join him inside his new lodge. There they prayed for the lodge, and finally helped the owner to make a purification sweatlodge outside. The cere-

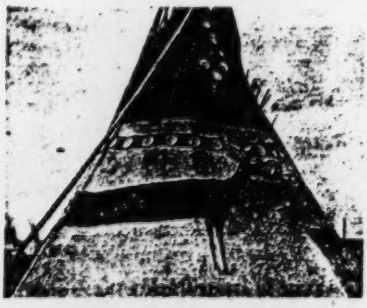
[574] [476] [237] [574] [782] [343]

[P. 26-A]

mony of transferring the sacred symbols from the old to the new lodge cover was then ended. 532

The old, worn, painted cover was disposed of either by taking it to a lake, spreading it out, and weighting it with stones so that it would sink; or by spreading it out on the plains and weighting it with stones. In the first instance the old cover was given as an offering to the water spirits; in the second, it was an offering to the sun. [182] [776]

The great animal figures were generally painted on the central portion of the lodge cover, about midway of the height of the lodge. In cases of the larger mammals such as the deer, elk, and buffalo and in that of the snake lodge, a single pair of animals are painted on the cover. They represent the mythical originator and his wife. In most instances they face the lodge doorway (east), the female on the north side of the lodge and the male on the south. However, on the buffalo lodges the two huge figures appear on the east and west sides. The male buffalo is on the east facing south; the female on the west side facing north. Some of the figures have narrow elongated bodies enabling them to extend nearly halfway around the circumference of the lodge. Each of the two figures on the deer painted lodge, for example, is more than fifteen feet long and less than five feet high. Where smaller mammals are represented, 531 532 [823]



22. Deer painted lodge in 1943.

[P.26-B]

from two to four pairs of them are depicted. The figures face east. 531 532

These animal figures generally are very stylized and decorative. Usually the body is of one solid color, either black, red or yellow. A characteristic elaborative device on most of them is the representation of the throat, heart and kidneys, which were believed to have been the sources of power of the animals depicted. [776] [825]

Many lodges decorated with animal paintings, and a number of others not so decorated, employ a similar composition of the upper and lower portions of the cover into two fields for geometric painting. At the bottom, a banded area two or more feet in height usually is painted red to represent the earth. Within this red area are one or two rows of unpainted disks representing fallen stars. A row of triangular or rounded projections upward from this band appears on a number of lodge covers, representing rounded hills or sharp mountain peaks. A banded area at the top of the cover, including the projecting ears, generally is painted black to represent the night sky. Two arrangements of unpainted disks within this area, one on each ear flap, represent the constellations of the Great Bear and the Pleiades. A Maltese cross on the west side of this top area is said to represent the morning star, or butterfly, believed to bring powerful dreams to the lodge owner. 821 531 532

In the old days only a small proportion 531 121

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23. Figures on the south side of an otter painted lodge, 1943

[P-29-A]

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24. Yellow buffalo painted lodge in 1943.

of the total number of lodges in a camp were painted, and some of the painted ones employed symbols of power other than animal figures. However, from the point of view of aesthetic interest, the lodges painted with animal figures are outstanding. Their great size, and their simple, primitive, decorative quality command attention and admiration. It is in the painted animal figures on lodge covers that we find the finest expression of Blackfeet religious art. Certainly they represent the highest achievement of traditional Blackfeet painting. 531 121

QUILLWORK

The Blackfeet Indians have a beautiful legend explaining how the first porcupines were given to one of their ancestors by the powerful Thunder spirit. The same legend states that Thunder taught this person how to do quillwork. This is said to have happened a very long time ago. Certainly porcupine quillwork is one of the Blackfeet decorative arts that originated before these Indians 237 [773] [776] [825] 531

[P. 27-B]

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23. The porcupine.

met White men. In historic times quillwork always has been women's work. 531 [462]

Porcupine Quills

The western porcupine has been a native of the Blackfeet country throughout the historic period. Porcupines are still abundant on and near the modern reservations of the Blackfeet in Montana and Alberta. The tail and most of the body of the porcupine are covered with hollow, cylindrical quills. Porcupine quills are of a whitish color with black tips. They vary in diameter and length. The largest quills, from the tail of the animal, are about five inches long and one-eighth inch in diameter. The finest, from the belly, are scarcely an inch in length and very thin. Intermediate sizes appear on the animal's back and neck. The Blackfeet rarely used the smaller quills in embroidery. The average porcupine yields about 8 ounces of quills. They are very light in weight, averaging about 4,000 to the ounce. 136 237 531 231

Dyeing Porcupine Quills

In Blackfeet quillwork some of the quills were used in their natural color, others were dyed to enable the craftswoman to work out attractive polychrome designs. Native dyestuffs were of vegetable origin. Before dyeing, the basal tip of each quill was broken off. Elderly Indians recalled that the quills were dyed by dampening a quantity of the dye plant in water, placing a number of quills on top of it, and wrapping them together in a piece of buckskin. The package was placed under the woman's bed on the ground inside the lodge, where it was pressed by the weight of her body for a 237 386 824 231 386

[P-28-A]

couple of nights. When the package was unwrapped the color of the plant would have penetrated the quills. The pine tree lichen, (Evernia Vulpina), was a favorite source of yellow dye. Its use for dying porcupine quills by the Blackfeet was mentioned by Maximilian in 1833. A red water plant or a red root supplied the red dye. A green water plant or a green grass served for dyeing quills green. A blue colored plant furnished the blue coloring matter. However, the Blackfeet early learned to dye quills by

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26. Buffalo calfskin bag containing quill worker's equipment.

[P.28-B]

boiling them in water with a quantity of colored trade cloth. This method was common in Maximilian's time. Nevertheless, despite the widespread use of commercial dyes, some Blackfeet women continued to employ native dyes within the memory of elderly Indians still living. Generally the plant dyes imparted a more delicate coloring to the quills than did the strong commercial dyes. 237 386 [177] [178]

The Quillworker's Tools and Methods

Elderly Blackfeet say that quillwork was regarded as a sacred craft by their people. Girls or young women were taught the craft by the older women. First the younger women were initiated ceremonially into the art of handling the sharp-pointed quills. It was claimed that women who attempted to do quillwork without having first experienced this ceremony would surely "go blind" or suffer from a swelling of the finger joints. Then they were taught how to use the tools of the quillworker's craft and how to employ the various methods of quill sewing, plaiting and wrapping known to their elders. Quills of the same size in assorted colors were kept in long, cigar shaped, bladder containers until ready for use. The quillworker's kit also included one or more bone or metal awls for making holes in the skin, a quantity of sinew thread for passing through these holes in attaching the quills to the surface of the skin, and a bone or horn instrument for pressing and flattening the quills after they had been sewn to a flat surface. The Blackfeet quillworker held quills in her mouth to soften them, then flattened them between her teeth and put them in place at once. It was customary for a beginner to give her first piece of quillwork as an offering to the sun. 237 [462] [868] [153] [415] [412] [283] [413] [182]

Articles Decorated with Quills

Today quillwork is almost a lost art among the Blackfeet. However, accounts written more than a century ago refer to quillwork as a flourishing decorative art in which Blackfeet women were very pro- 237 531 294

41; Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
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37. Buffalo bone quill flattener.

ficient. In the 1870's Blackfeet women still 237
applied quilled decorations to men's shirts 531
and leggings, moccasins and robes. They 214
also decorated broad bands, divided at intervals by disks, which were sewn lengthwise over the centers of buffalo robes or trade blankets. A section of one of these bands, decorated with red, orange, purple, yellow and natural colored quills, is shown in figure 29. Quillwork was also employed in the decoration of Blackfeet feather bonnets. Long, narrow, thin strips of rawhide were wrapped with quills. The strips were then sewn to the ribs of the feathers. Most of the articles decorated with quillwork by the Blackfeet at that time were items of men's costume. Women's dresses and moccasins [294]
were rarely quill decorated in the '70's, although in earlier years the use of quills on those articles was common. It is possible that other types of articles were decorated with quillwork by Blackfeet women a century ago.

By 1880, beadwork had become so pop- 237
[P. 29-B] 531
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[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 30-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
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28. Crowfoot, North Blackfoot chief, wearing a quilled shirt, 1886.

[P-30-A]

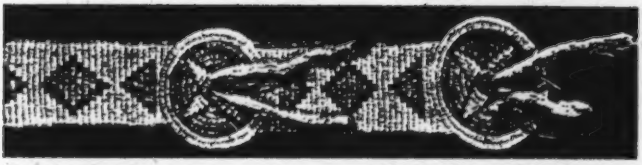
ular among the Blackfeet as to cause most of the women to abandon the older work in quills. The younger women showed little or no interest in learning quillwork, and only a few of the older women continued to practice it. Of late years, due to the difficulty of obtaining imported beads in wartime, there has been a slight revival of interest in quillwork on the Canadian Blackfeet reserves which may prevent the complete abandonment of this fine, old craft by the Blackfeet. 237 178 531

Quillworking Techniques

A study of the techniques employed by Blackfeet quillworkers is handicapped by the relatively small number of genuine examples of old Blackfeet quillwork in museum or private collections. Although a considerable number of quill decorated articles have been collected from the Blackfeet tribes, many of them are known to have been of alien manufacture. Since the 1880's, the Blackfeet have received a great many quilled men's suits, tobacco pouches and other quill-decorated articles as gifts from Assiniboine and Dakota. Even before that time the Blackfeet probably obtained quilled articles through trade or capture from the tribes to the east and southeast. The existence of large numbers of these foreign articles in Blackfeet collections makes difficult the problem of defining the character of Blackfeet quillwork on the basis of old specimens. 237 531 431 531 439 531 127 531

However, in 1910, William C. Orchard made a detailed study of a limited number of pieces of quillwork collected among the Blackfeet in the preceding decade by Dr. Clark Wissler. These specimens were believed to have been made by Blackfeet. The quillworkers who made these pieces employed eight different techniques of applying the quills. Six of these methods were believed to have been traditional Blackfeet techniques, while the other two were considered to have been adopted from neighboring tribes in recent years. Figure 30 illustrates the six traditional techniques. 237 531

[P.30-B]



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39. Section of a quilled blanket band.

[P.31-A]

Four old methods of sewing single quills to a flat surface were distinguished. In the first (A. figure 30) two parallel lines of sinew thread are passed through the leather at intervals and the quill is folded under the thread between each stitch in the skin. The finished work presents the appearance of a narrow band on which the quills run at right angles to the length of the band. The second method (B. figure 30) is like the first, except that the width of the band is gradually varied to produce patterns in quillwork. The third technique (C. page 30) employs a loopstitch to place the quills diagonally on the band. The fourth(D. figure 30) produces a V-shaped surface pattern by crossing the quill over itself obliquely. The sewing is done by the simple spot stitch (as in A and B) but the stitches in the two lines of sewing are not directly opposite one another as they are in A and B. A method of plaiting was also employed (E. figure 30) in which two quill elements cross each other obliquely, under one and over one, forming a diamond shaped pattern. This technique was used for narrow bands, or in widths limited only by the size of the area to be decorated. Where the width is more than the length of a quill, a system of lapping is used, by which the lappings are carefully concealed under the crossing elements. In the other techniques of quill sewing, care was always taken to overlap two adjoining quills so that the laps were entirely concealed. A sixth technique (figure 30 F) was employed for wrapping quills about fringes or narrow rawhide strips, by a system of overlapping the ends of the quills. The overlappings were always made on the same side of the strip.

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(P.31-B)

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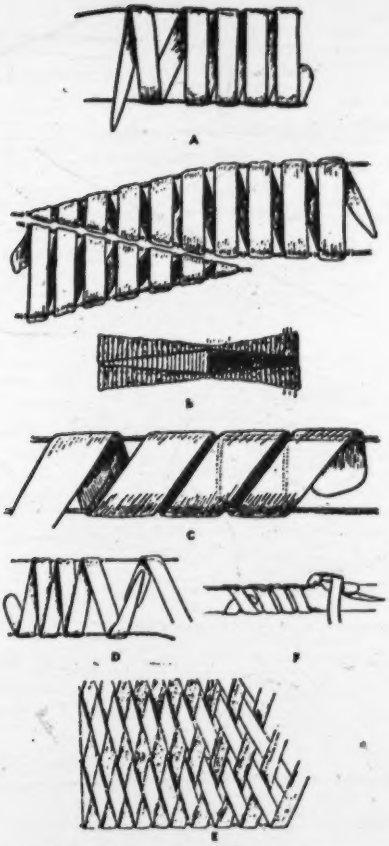

30. Techniques employed at Blackfoot Quill work.

[P.31-C]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

Compared with the quillwork of neighboring tribes to the east, Blackfeet quillwork techniques were both few in number and simple in performance. They seem to have lacked the weaving technique of the Cree and the multiple quill sewing and plaiting of the Dakota. The preference of the Blackfeet for narrow bands of quillwork limited the possibilities for variety in design motifs. Small, angular designs predominate in Blackfeet quillwork.

BEADWORK

Blackfeet bead embroidery originated within the historic period and had a dual origin. The little glass or china beads themselves, made by Venetian craftsmen in far-off Italy, were introduced by White fur traders. For ways to use these beads the native women turned to their traditional Indian craft of quillwork for inspiration. In the selection of articles and areas for decoration and in the choice of designs, Blackfeet beadworkers followed the traditions of the older craft. Like quillwork also, beadwork has been a woman's craft.

History of Blackfeet Beadwork

The history of Blackfeet use of beads may be divided into three periods. The first period may be termed the Pre-embroidery or Bead Necklace Period, during which large beads were used to make necklaces,

31. Necklace of wild rosehips.

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32. Necklace of bear claws and polychrome beads.

bracelets, fringe decorations and hair ornaments. Before these beads were introduced the Blackfeet probably employed native materials in much the same way. They made necklaces of fish vertebrae, roseberries, silver berries, a certain sweet smelling root, shells, pendant bear or eagle claws, and the teeth of the buffalo, elk, or horse, strung on a buckskin cord. Early in the eighteenth century fur traders of the Hudson's Bay Company and their competitors, the French from Montreal, offered beads in trade to the Indians east of the Blackfeet. A trade list for the several factories of the Hudson's Bay Company in the year 1748, lists "Large Milk beads" valued at one beaver skin for a half pound of beads, "beads of Colours," at three-fourths of a pound for a beaver skin, and "beads of all Sorts," at one pound of beads for two beaver skins. A few of these trade beads may have reached the Blackfeet indirectly through trade with the Indians east of them.

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[P. 32-B]

By the 1780's however, White traders were in direct contact with the Blackfeet and were able to offer them beads in trade. These early trade beads vary in size, color and shape. Most of them were over one-fourth inch in diameter. Many were considerably longer than that. Some were monochrome, while the surfaces of others were covered with patterns of various colors. Indians learned to introduce a few of the new trade beads at intervals on their necklaces of claws, teeth or other native materials. By 1833, these necklace beads were still expensive. Maximilian said the Blackfeet bought them from the American Fur Company in that year for the equivalent of three or four dollars a pound, and that they were highly regarded by the Indian women. Embroidering beads by that time were in use among the Blackfeet, but they were not intended to replace the larger necklace beads. The latter are still worn by some of the older Indians. Elderly Indians say that in their youth a large blue bead with a raised pattern of meandering lines and flower buds in white and red was considered a very old type of necklace bead. These "Skunk beads," as they called them, were then rare. A necklace of them was worth a good horse and a robe. "Crow beads" were a more common type of necklace bead, they say. These are irregular, monochrome, china beads over one-fourth inch in diameter. Light blue "Crow beads" were most popular, although they were available in medium blue, pale green, light red and black as well. Large brass beads, which the Indians termed "iron beads," were also popular. A smaller bead, three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter, transparent red on the outside with a lining of opaque white, was used primarily for children's necklaces. Older Indians call these "under white beads."

175 439 301 [237] [177] [175] [435] [178] [435]

The second period opened with the first use of embroidering beads among the Blackfeet. It may be termed the Real Bead Period, for the Blackfeet called the bead type characteristic of this period "real bead."

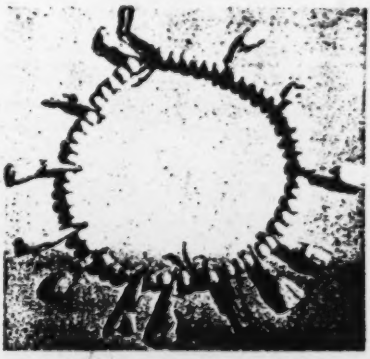
175 301 [294]

[P.33-A]

.41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

Real beads were considerably smaller than the majority of necklace beads, but larger than the seed beads used in Blackfeet embroidery in more recent times. The beads are irregularly shaped, about one-eighth inch in diameter, made of china. They are monochrome. The color range includes light blue, dark blue, dark red, deep yellow, white and black. The blue and white beads seem to have been most favored by the Blackfeet. These beads were sold by the bunch or hank. Each hank consisted of 10 strings, all about eight inches long. About the year 1870, eight hanks of different colored "real beads" were worth a good robe. In earlier times they were probably much more expensive.

Maximilian in 1833, was the first writer to mention Blackfeet bead embroidery. He noted their preference for sky-blue and white beads in the decoration of women's dresses and men's suits. Alexander Henry, in his detailed description of Blackfeet clothing two decades earlier, made no mention of the use of beads in its decoration. It is probable that very few embroidering beads were used by the Blackfeet before the American Fur Company opened its trade with them in 1831. "Real beads" were most commonly applied in narrow bands to articles of costume, women's dresses, men's

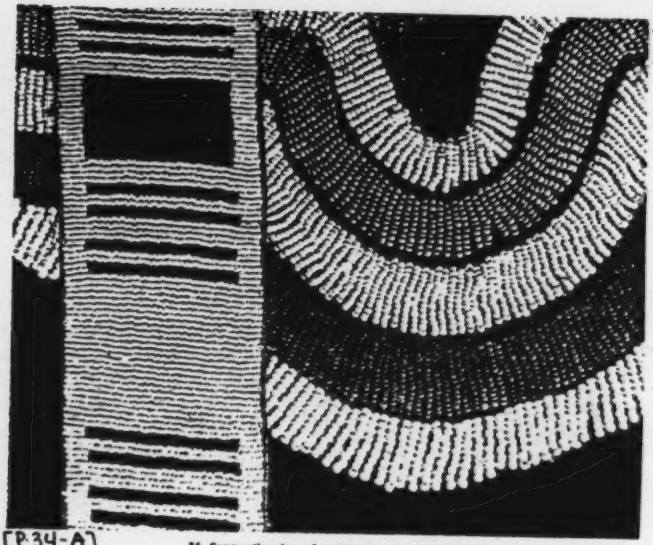


33. Necklace of buffalo teeth and Crow beads.

[P.33-B]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 348]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6



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[P.34-A]

34. Comparative sizes of seed beads and seed beads.

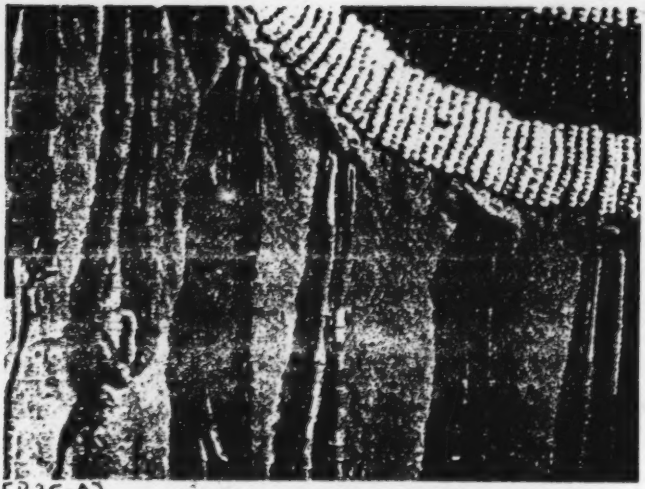
shirts, leggings, and moccasins. The older technique of quillwork was never replaced by beadwork throughout the "real bead" period, save possibly for the decoration of women's dresses. Rather the two crafts existed side by side. Some costumes were decorated with beads, some with quills. The areas of decoration and the designs were much the same in both techniques. 294 178 [53]

The real bead period came to a close with the adoption of smaller sized seed beads by the Blackfeet about 1875. A few Blackfeet women married to White men may have begun to use the smaller beads by 1870. Seed beads seem to have been employed by the younger women in the 1870's, while some of the older, more conservative women continued to use the older "real beads" in the 1880's. Women's dresses continued to be decorated with "real beads" until near the end of the century. Thus the change from "real beads" to seed beads was gradual. We may date the Seed Bead Period from the year 1875, by which time seed beads were in fairly common use among Blackfeet beadworkers. [177]

Seed beads are made of glass or china. They were supplied by traders in a number of sizes, all of them quite small. The largest are about one-sixteenth of an inch in diameter, about half the size of "real beads." The older seed beads were generally irregular in size and outline, and opaque. More recent ones are even, and some of them translucent. Beadworkers had a choice of a wide range of colors and hues in seed beads. For a brief period of a little more than a decade, following the opening of 439 [175] [178]

[P.34-B]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 35-B]



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[P-35-A]

32. Comparative sizes of real beads and basket beads.

trader's stores in the new town of Browning in 1896, a larger, transparent bead, three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter and either three-sixteenths or one-half of an inch in length, known as a basket bead, was very popular with the Montana Blackfeet. It was commonly used in the decoration of women's dresses made during that period. However, its popularity waned almost as quickly as it had grown. The little seed bead is still favored by modern Blackfeet women in their bead embroidery. [439] [178] [175] [294]

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a florescence of Blackfeet beadwork and a decadence of quillwork. Most of the articles of soft skin or cloth used by these Indians were decorated with beadwork. Beadwork was applied liberally to dress clothing (men's shirts, leggings and breech cloths, women's dresses and leggings; moccasins, blanket bands, and feather bonnet headbands); to many kinds of containers (awl cases, gun cases, quivers, and tobacco, paint, toilet and shot pouches); to horse equipment (women's saddles and pad saddles, saddle bags, martingales and cruppers); to cradles, to the cloth edges of willow back rests, and to a variety of religious paraphernalia. Many specimens of traditional Blackfeet beadwork made during this period are preserved in museum collections. [531] [178] [237] [294]

Beadwork Techniques

The common Blackfeet technique of bead embroidery is very similar to the older technique of quillwork. In decorating an article of skin or cloth with seed beads two threads are used, one for stringing the beads, the other for sewing them down. In the geometric designs the beads are arranged in parallel rows, massed tightly together. One

(P-35-B)

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 36B]

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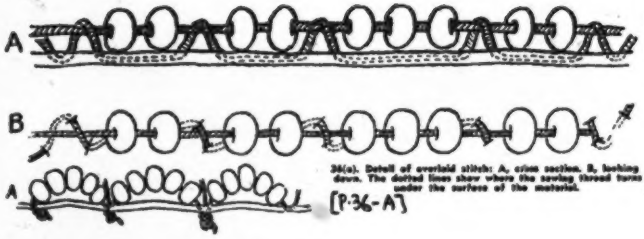

36(a). Detail of overlaid stitch: A, cross section. B, looking down. The dotted lines show where the sewing thread turns under the surface of the material.

[P.36-A]

36(b). Detail of lazy stitch: A, cross section; B, looking down —dotted lines indicate turn of thread under surface of the material; C, same as B, but with beads separated to show more clearly.

end of the first thread is attached to the skin or cloth, and beads of sufficient number to give the length of line desired are strung on the thread and laid in place on the material. The beads are sewn down flat to the surface by stitches taken with the second thread over the first thread and into the material between every two or three beads. When the work is completed it presents a flat surface on which the beads are so close together as to conceal both threads. This technique is commonly called overlaid or spot stitch beading. Older Indians say this same technique usually was employed in attaching "real beads." An exception is found in the beading of women's dress yokes. The beads on these yokes usually are attached only at the ends of the rows, producing a loose, ridged effect. This is the so-called "lazy stitch." It is typical of Dakota beadwork, but uncommon in that of the Blackfeet. Some Blackfeet beadworkers have used commercial thread instead of sinew. However, sinew is not only the traditional sewing material, it is also stronger and more durable. Metal needles supplied by traders have been used by beadworkers for more than a century.

531 294 53 171 531 [283] [439]

[P. 36-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

EMBROIDERY DESIGNS

For generations tradition has had a powerful influence on the Blackfeet beadworker's choice of designs. Most beadworkers have preferred to use a limited number of simple motives which were employed by their mothers, their grandmothers, and even their earlier ancestors in their work, rather than to experiment with novel forms and arrangements. Through the years the continuity of Blackfeet beadwork and quillwork design remained unbroken until the introduction of leaf and flower patterns about the year 1870. Since that time two basic varieties of design have been in use among the Blackfeet. The older of these employs abstract geometric elements solely, following the tribal tradition of the pre-floral period. The second employs decorative flower and leaf patterns introduced from an alien source or sources within the lifetime of older Indians still living on the Blackfeet Reservation, in Montana.

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Geometric Designs

The problem of design in Blackfeet quillwork and geometric beadwork was solved by the composition of small squares, rectangles, and occasionally triangles into patterns. Where the decorative field is large these patterns usually cover but a small portion of it, leaving large areas of monochrome background or sizable masses of solid color. This is characteristic of both Blackfeet quillwork and beadwork. Relatively simple units of design common in Blackfeet beadwork are shown on page 37.

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[P. 36-C]

DESIGN UNITS COMMON IN BLACKFEET QUILL AND BEADWORK 531

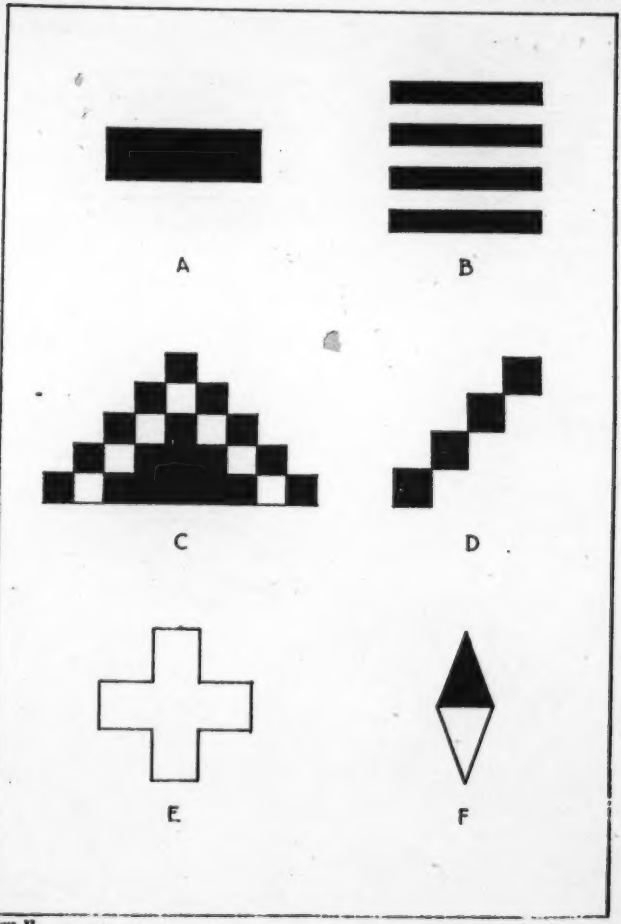

Figure 37.

38. Geometric designs on a beaded dagger sheath.

The stripe appears as a single unit, A. Or in series of parallel units one over the other, B. The stripes are beaded either in solid monochrome or internally elaborated by transverse bars of another color. The triangular step or checker, known to the Indians as the "mountain design" is very common, unit C. It is used as a single unit, or two such units are arranged apex to apex to form an hourglass-like figure, or one directly on top of the other, or base to base to form a diamond-shape figure. Another common unit is the diagonal checker-row formed of small squares, D. A blocky cross E, is common in older Blackfeet work. The double triangle sometimes called "feather design" appears somewhat less commonly in Blackfeet design, F. It appears most frequently on long banded areas, such as are used to decorate men's shirts and leggings. The predominance of thick, square or rectangular elements, and the lack of narrow lines of one or two rows of beads in most Blackfeet beadwork suggests its derivation from the older quillwork. The common use of parallel rows of quills applied in narrow bands favored the employment of small, right angled designs in Blackfeet quillwork.

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[P.38-A]

Floral Designs

Maximilian noted that a Piegan chief, Middle Bull, wore a shirt of bighorn leather "embroidered on the sleeves with blue flowers," in the summer of 1833. This is the only reference to the occurrence of floral designs among the Blackfeet in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is possible that the shirt was made by a person of some other tribe. Elderly Indians have said that floral designs were not employed in old Blackfeet quillwork, and were uncommon in beadwork in their youth. These designs seem to have been directly or indirectly inspired by the flower designs appearing in the embroidery of White people. Some older Indians claim that Blackfeet women, married to White men at Fort Benton, obtained the patterns from pieces of embroidery in the possession of their husbands. Others have said that the Blackfeet copied the floral designs in the beadwork of the Cree, Ojibwa, or Flathead, who in turn may have been influenced by the White men's designs at an earlier date. The Plains Cree themselves attribute the origin of their floral designs to halfbreeds from the east.

Elderly Indians have recalled that a few Blackfeet women made leaf, but not flower, designs in "real beads" before 1870. Women collected leaves, pressed them, and used them for patterns of leaf forms cut out of colored flannel. The flannel was sewn to the surface of the article to be decorated and the outlines of the flannel leaves were edged with "real beads." After seed beads came into common use in the mid-'70's, the entire surfaces of more complex floral designs in leaves, stems and flowers were covered with several colors of beadwork. The extensive employment of complex floral patterns in Blackfeet beadwork coincided with the increase in the use of seed beads. Photographs of Piegan Indians in the 1880's indicate that moccasins beaded in flowered patterns were then about as common as ones decorated with geometric designs. The flowered designs were also popular in the

[P·38-B]

decoration of other articles of clothing and riding gear. Some beadworkers made compositions combining flowered designs with some of their earlier geometric ones. Floral designs commonly were combined with a thin lined design known as the "double-curve motive" also. The double-curve is believed to be at least as old among the Blackfeet as are the floral designs. Like them, too, it is credited to alien influence. One interesting native theory, traces the origin of the double-curve among the Blackfeet to designs of this form that appeared on cast iron stoves, a few of which were owned by White men residing in the Blackfeet country. Floral patterns have remained in favor among many of the older Indians to the present day for the decoration of articles for their own use, such as moccasins that are worn daily, and on articles of dress costume such as breech cloths, gauntlets, and some men's shirts and leggings. Floral designs are common on soft skin pouches, pad saddles, saddle bags, and martingales from the Blackfeet in museum collections.

531 294 [282] [177] [178] 531

The Decoration of Moccasins

The pattern of Blackfeet moccasin construction underwent a change in the nineteenth century. Older Indians refer to the earlier one-piece, soft-soled moccasin as "real moccasin." It survived to the end of buffalo days as the typical, hair lined, winter moccasin. The typical Blackfeet moccasin of today is said to have come into use among them in the early or middle nineteenth century. It is of two pieces— a hard rawhide sole, and a soft skin upper. The upper is decorated before it is sewn with

531 294 [178]

[P. 39-A]

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39. Simple floral design on a tobacco pouch.

sinew to the rawhide sole. Six types of 531
moccasin decoration, identified by older 294
Piegan and Blood Indians as ones that have been much used by the Blackfeet, appear on page 40. Blackfeet moccasins are characterized by relatively small areas of decoration, confined largely or entirely to
[P. 39-B]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 41-A]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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[P.39-C]

40. Complex floral design on a martingale.

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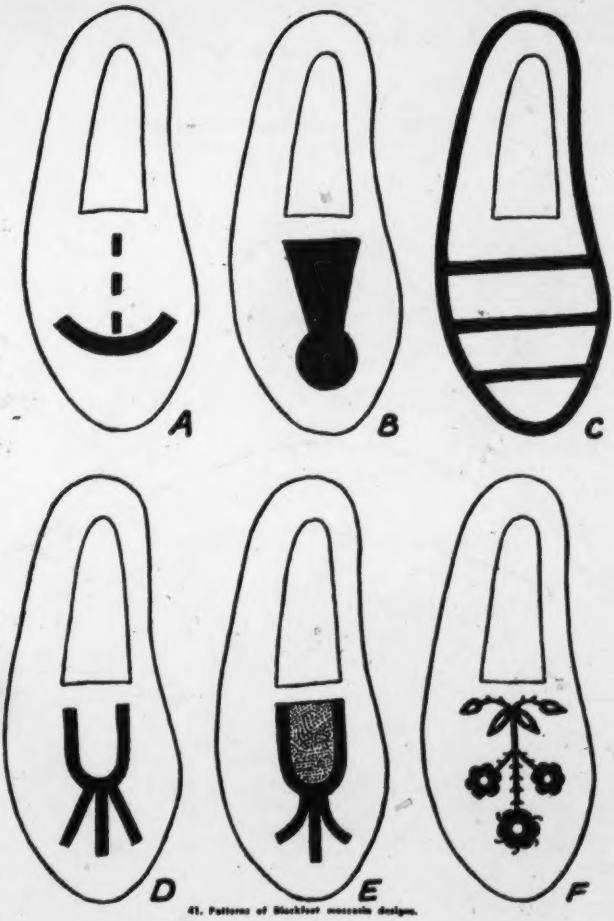

41. Patterns of Blackfoot moccasin designs.

the front, or toe and instep area. Uppers completely covered with beadwork, such as were common among the Cheyenne, Arapaho and the Siouan tribes of the Northern Plains were not characteristic of the Blackfeet. 531 294

Elderly Indians claim that the oldest Blackfeet moccasin design with which they are familiar is Type A. It was much used for decorating one-piece, winter moccasins with quillwork or real beads in their youth. One advantage of the design was that it used few beads. The curved or angular front element was but four beads wide. The three "jumps" were only two rows wide. The design was commonly made in two colors, either red and white quills, or red and blue or yellow and red beads. Indians call this design "crooked nose quillwork" or "crooked nose beadwork." A pair of one piece moccasins bearing this decoration in yellow and blue seed beads is shown in figure 42. The basic design is here elaborated by a frontal projection. 531 294

Another old moccasin design is Type B. It was known as "round quillwork" or "round beaded work." It was often combined with a band of decoration around the edge of the upper above the sole joint. Women who had few beads sometimes cut the pattern out of flannel and sewed it to the moccasin. The artist Bodmer's drawings among the Crow and Mandan in 1833, show that the same basic pattern was employed by those tribes more than 100 years ago. [175] [171]

Type C is also an old pattern of Blackfeet moccasin decoration, done in quillwork or beadwork. Indians call it "cross quillwork or beadwork" or "striped quillwork or beadwork." It consists of a series of evenly spaced stripes across the toes and instep and a border around the edge of the upper. Red, yellow and green quills were commonly used in the design. Bodmer also represents this basic pattern in his drawings of Mandan Indians in 1833. [175] [171]

Types D and E may be mentioned together. The former has been termed an old

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43. "Crooked nose beadwork" applied to a pair of soft-soled moccasins.

design done in quillwork, the U-shape of which covered the joint of an inserted tongue in an old type of one-piece moccasin. Type D is more modern, although this decoration appears on moccasins worn by Piegan Indians in photographs taken in the 1880's. The base is of flannel, edged with beadwork, and the three projections are in beadwork. Older Indians believe that White men played some part in the development of this pattern. The pattern is termed "White man sewing," "half breed work" or "three finger beadwork." Indians deny that the three-pronged figure is intended to symbolize the three divisions of the Blackfeet, as some White writers have suggested.

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Some older Indians state that the "mountain design" was used for decorating dress moccasins in either quillwork or beadwork many years ago, but one woman over 80 years old, denied that it was ever much used to decorate moccasins.

Type F, a floral design, has been employed extensively in the decoration of Blackfeet moccasins since the 1870's. It has always been made in seed beads. There is considerable variation in the pattern, but usually it is bilaterally symmetrical on the long axis.

In the summer of 1833, Maximilian observed that the quill decorated moccasins

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[175]

[P·41-B]

43. "White man saving" design on a child's moccasin.

of the Blackfeet each had a ground of a different color for its ornament; thus, if one was white, the other was yellow. He also attributed this custom to the Gros Ventre, but said it was not known to the tribes further down the Missouri. This seems to have been a custom that became obsolete among the Blackfeet by the second half of the century. None of our older informants had heard of it, although they stated that medicine men or women were accustomed to paint their moccasins red with earth paint, and mourners sometimes painted their moccasins black.

531 294 178 [175] [171] [156] [165]

Decoration of Women's Dresses

It is probable that the Blackfeet woman's dress style was also changed during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Before that time the characteristic woman's dress may have been simply a long slip fastened

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44. Moccasins beaded in floral pattern.

[P.42-A]

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45. Woman's dress, probably more than 100 years old.

by bands over the shoulders, with separate sleeves tied together at the neck in cold weather. There is considerable evidence that this was the characteristic dress of the tribes to the eastward of the Blackfeet on the Northern Plains as far south as the Mandan Villages before 1800. However, the typical Blackfeet woman's dress in Maximilian's time (1833) and since, has been fashioned with a cape pieced to the body of the dress, extending over the shoulders and upper arms, fitting rather close to the neck. In pattern, everyday dresses and those worn for special occasions were the same, but the latter were elaborately decorated, whereas those used for rough wear were not. Maximilian observed that the best dresses of the women were ornamented with "dyed porcupine quills and thin leather strips, with broad diversified stripes of sky-blue and white glass beads. The elkskin dress shown in figure 45, believed to have been obtained by the naturalist, Audubon, in 1843, illus-

291 178 175 531 294 [292] [175] [178]

[P42-B]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 44-B]

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46. Real beads used to decorate a dress of blue trade cloth.

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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[P.44-A]

47. Women dressed in cloth costumes dancing, ca. 1910.

trates the typical woman's decorated dress of the last hundred years. The decoration is in dark blue and white "real beads," applied in bands at the top of the dress over each shoulder, to a wider, meandering banded area over the breast, and a narrow band at the lower edge. The breast band is always applied in vertical strings of beads of a single color. The area is divided into long, parallel, meandering bands of two or more colors, one placed above another to form the design. In the late '90's and early years of the present century, "basket beads" generally were employed in this decoration. Decorative patches of red and black flannel were added to the lower portions of woman's dresses, as shown on the Audubon specimen. In the old days wealthy men's wives were wont to decorate their dresses with four rows of elk teeth instead of, or in addition to, the beadwork. In more recent years silk dresses have been decorated after the fashion of the traditional ones of skin.

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Decoration of Woman's Leggings

Women's leggings were formerly of skin, more recently of flannel (usually red or

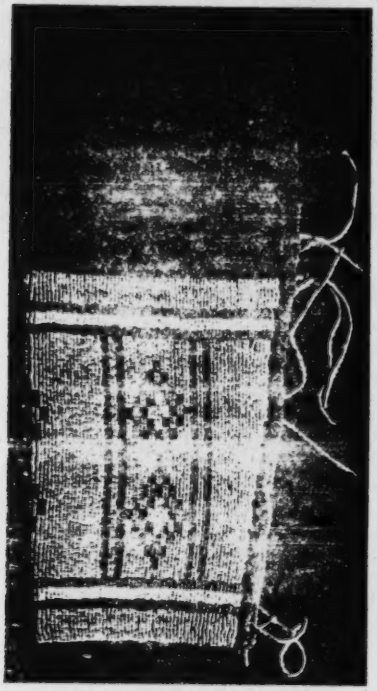
P.44-B

blue). They reached to the knee, and had a single, vertical seam on the outside. The beaded designs are usually limited to the lower portion of the legging visible below the low-hanging dress. Most commonly the beaded pattern is comprised of horizontal stripes, or stripes and the mountain design. Little girl's best leggings and dresses were made and decorated like women's clothing scaled down to a smaller size. 531 294

Decoration of Men's Suits

Like that of the women, the everyday clothing of Blackfeet men was generally plain and undecorated except with fringes. Their ceremonial or dress suits, however, were very elaborately decorated with quill-work or beadwork, sometimes with painting, and weasel tails or hair fringe. The construction pattern of the typical dress suit of the nineteenth century probably goes back to prehistoric times. The shirt was made of two deer or antelope hides cut and pieced together. It was of the poncho type, put on over the head, with long, closed sleeves, and the traditional style retained the skin from the hind legs of the animals which hung [292] [237] [291] 294 [281]

[p. 44-c]



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48. Woman's beaded leggings.

down in long trailers at each side, front and back. A more modern style eliminates these trailers by cutting the skin straight across or in a slight arc at the bottom. There were two styles of finishing the neck. Either a V-shaped flap, decorated with fringe and stripes of quillwork or beadwork, was inserted, front and back, or the insert was omitted. In the latter case the shirt usually is decorated with a large rosette in quillwork or beadwork over the chest and in a corresponding position on the back. Maximilian in 1833, found both these styles in use among the Blackfeet, although he stated that the use of rosettes was a foreign fashion, derived from the Assiniboine. Some

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[P 45-A]

men's suits made in the late years of the nineteenth century have the insert beaded in horizontal stripes. Others exhibit the beaded rosettes. Bands of quillwork or beadwork were laid over the shoulders and down the sleeves covering the sleeve seams. In Maximilian's time these were generally of quillwork three fingers (about two inches) wide. The old style beaded bands in "real beads" were the same width. Bodmer illustrates three of them as worn by prominent leaders in 1833. The simple bar and cross designs are in white, the backgrounds in blue beads. Elderly men today say that in their youth a band about two inches wide with narrow, solid color borders and central decorated area was considered an old type of sleeve or shoulder decoration. The borders were beaded first, and the decoration in the central area applied afterward. The larger size embroidering beads, "real beads," were then used. Backgrounds for the decorations were either white or blue.

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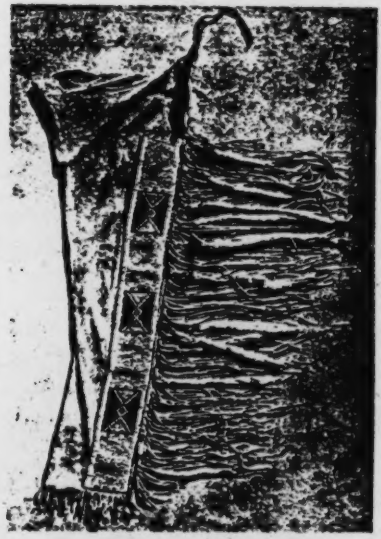

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49. Man's beaded leggings

[P.45-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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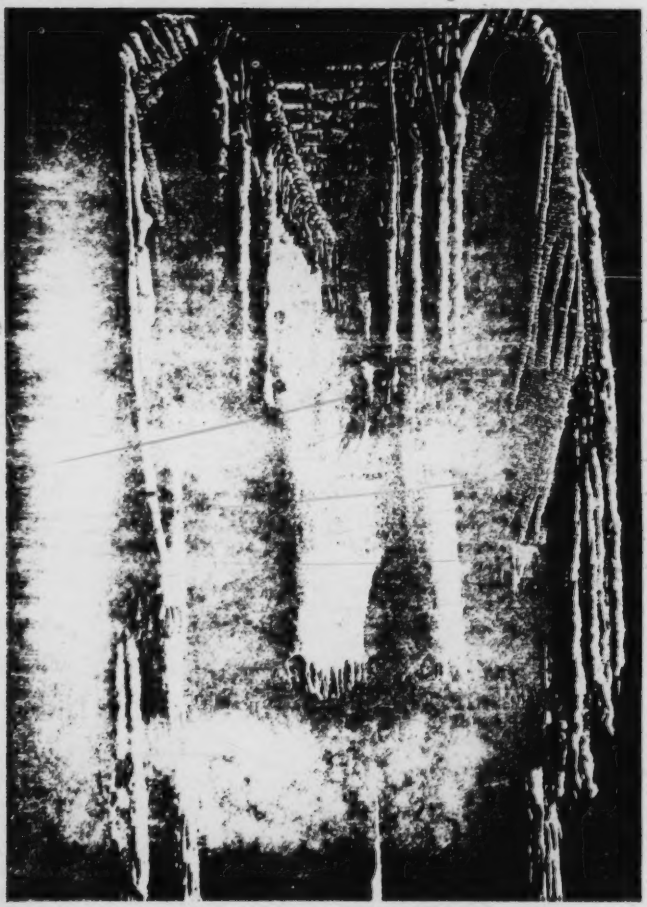

38. Man's shirt, decorated with beadwork and weasel skin fringe.

The design was usually very simple, and in monochrome. The women still used the bar and cross illustrated by Bodmer and also employed the mountain design, the elongated feather (usually in pairs side by side) and an hour glass formed by two triangles turned apex to apex. In the 1880's the younger Piegan women began to bead wider

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[178]

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shirt and legging strips, without borders, using a greater variety of colors in seed beads and a somewhat greater variety of designs.

The traditional men's leggings were of deer or antelope skin to match the shirt. They reached to the hips. Each legging was supported by a skin strap tied to the belt. When new suits were made up in the old days the leggings and shirts were decorated

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[291]

[P.49-A]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 49-A]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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51. Beaded shirts worn by three chiefs in the summer of 1833.

(P·47-B)

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52. Small boy's beaded suit.

to match. Each legging bore a long, vertical band of quillwork or beadwork along the outside of the leg. In width and design it was similar to the shoulder and arm bands of the shirt. However, shirts sometimes were transferred from one owner to another without the leggings so that it was not uncommon for men to be seen in dress shirts and leggings with different patterns of decoration. Small boys' dress suits were men's suits in miniature.

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[432]

Men who had taken scalps or killed enemies in war were privileged to wear hair lock fringes and horizontal painted stripes on their shirts and leggings.

A man's dress suit was a precious possession. Great care went into its manufacture

[P-48-A]

and decoration. It is said that the fastest Piegan beadwork, in the late years of the use of "real beads," required nearly three weeks to complete a man's shirt, leggings and moccasins. In the more recent seed bead period women have been known to work months on a suit. Such a suit was worn only in ceremonials or on other special occasions, and was carefully preserved so that the owner might be buried in it. 531 294 [292] [764]

Decoration of Robes and Blankets

Some buffalo robes, worn by wealthy men or women on dress occasions, were decorated with porcupine quills in narrow, parallel bands running the long dimension of the hide, about a foot apart. There was generally a block of red quills in the center of each line flanked by sections of quillwork in other colors. A robe of this kind also had a triangle of quillwork about eight inches high, pointing inward from each of the hind leg areas of the hide. This robe known simply as "quilled robe." It was valued at more than two horses. 531 237 294 556 [435]

Bands of quillwork or beadwork formerly were placed along the centers of buffalo robes or blankets. These bands generally were divided at intervals in their length by rosettes. (See Page 64) 531 237

Decoration of Containers

Many soft skin containers made in the last 75 years by the Blackfeet have been decorated with beadwork. It is not known to what extent quillwork was formerly used on these articles. In the decoration of small containers such as awl cases and paint pouches the beaded designs are composed generally of stripes, elaborated by transverse bars. The typical Blackfeet pipe and tobacco pouch was formerly decorated with geometric designs. Those made in late buffalo days generally employed mountain designs and stripes in the pattern of the nearly square beaded area immediately above the fringe. Later flowered patterns were extensively employed on these soft skin pouches. 531 415

[P-48-B]

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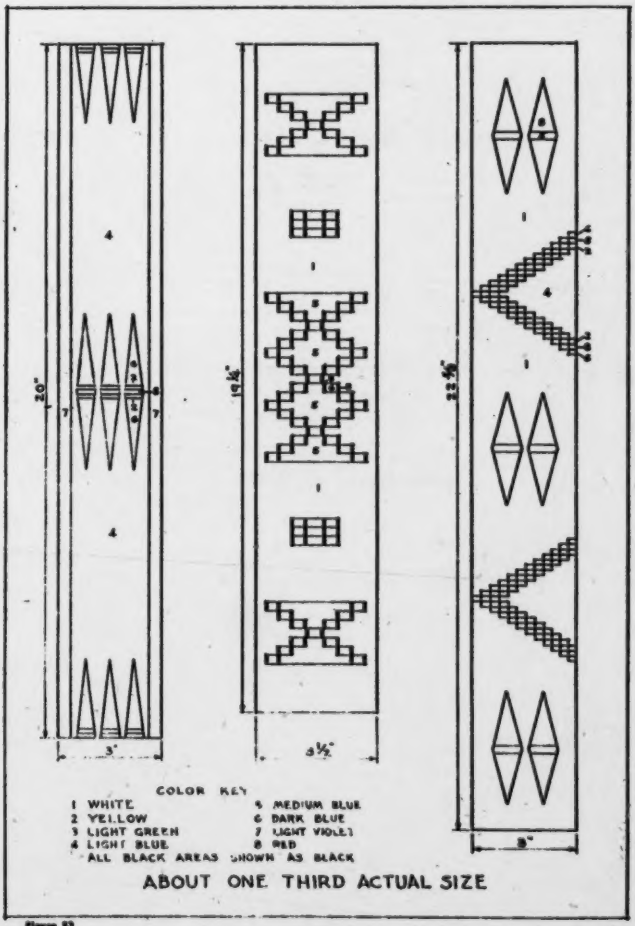
DESIGNS USED ON MEN'S SHIRT BANDS



ABOUT ONE THIRD ACTUAL SIZE

Figure 33

DESIGNS USED ON MEN'S SHIRT BANDS

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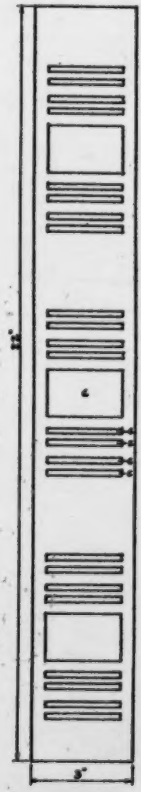

ABOUT ONE THIRD ACTUAL SIZE

Figure 34

ROSETTE DESIGNS USED ON MEN'S SHIRTS AND BLANKET BANDS

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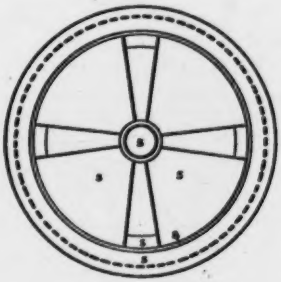

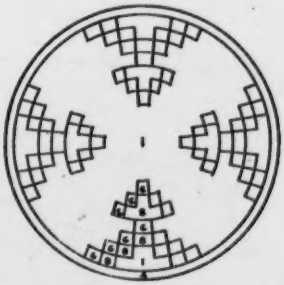

ABOUT ONE HALF ACTUAL SIZE

Figure 39

ROSETTE DESIGNS USED ON MEN'S SHIRTS AND BLANKET BANDS

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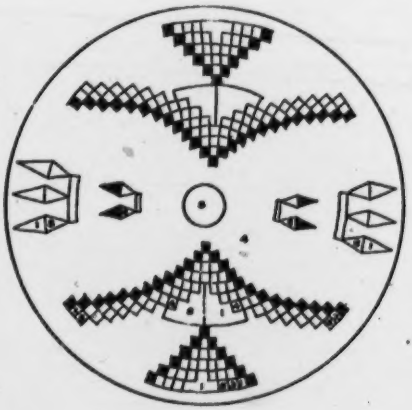

ABOUT ONE HALF ACTUAL SIZE

Figure 50

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37. Beaded navel cord amulet.

Decoration of Riding Gear

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Those articles of riding equipment that offered sizable, flat, soft surfaces were generally decorated with beadwork. These included men's soft, hair stuffed pad saddles, martingales and cruppers used generally by women, and double saddle bags. Some pad saddles were formerly decorated with small rosettes near the corners, more recently with floral designs. The soft skin bases of martingales and cruppers were covered with red or black flannel. Older Indians say that in their youth the flannel was decorated in beadwork with angular designs "something like parfleche designs." In more recent times floral designs, combined with a

[P·53-A]

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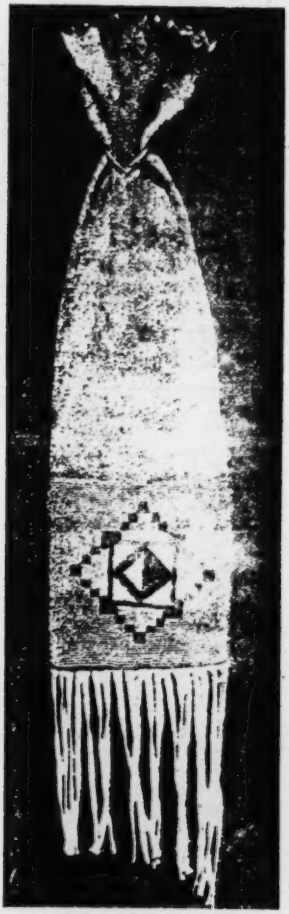

58. Beaded tobacco pouch.

double-curve have been employed. Nearly square flannel panels were sewed onto the saddle bags also. When the bag was in place over the horn of the saddle, one panel hung at each side of the horse. Before floral patterns were in vogue, these panels

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[P. 53-B]

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415
→

59. Beaded medicine necklace pouch and awl case.

were commonly decorated with geometric designs, consisting of horizontal stripes, mountain designs and other small elements. In recent times beaded flowers and double-curves have been used to decorate the panels. Fancy saddles used by women in parades in recent times are decorated with pendant triangular flaps hanging from their high horns and others from the stirrups. These, too, are beaded.

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[P.54-A]

Symbolism

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Many White people believe that every Indian design is endowed with some symbolic meaning to the Indian. In reality most Blackfeet designs in painting, quillwork and beadwork are purely abstract, decorative forms as devoid of meaning as the pattern on the average White man's necktie or on his wife's dress. The Indian names for most of the common Blackfeet designs are descriptive rather than symbolic. Even in the case of the "mountain design" it is most probable that the name was given as an easy means of identification after the design form was developed. There is little likelihood that the design was devised to represent a mountain. It is only in the religious painting of the Blackfeet, that a high degree of symbolism is present. It is most complex in the decoration of Blackfeet painted lodges.

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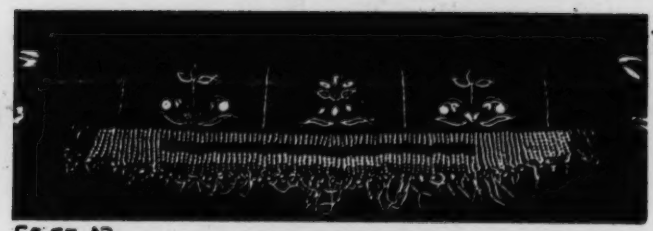
69. Beaded flap on the pommel of a woman's saddle.

[P.54-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6



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61. Beaded moccasins for a woman's horse.

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

SOME MINOR CRAFTS

The Blackfeet practised a number of traditional crafts in which they made use of basic materials other than animal skins. These were specialized crafts, unrelated to one another or to the four major crafts that have been described. We may speak of them as the minor crafts. Five of the most common of these crafts in the old days were the manufacture of pottery, tobacco pipes, horn spoons, wooden bowls, and feather bonnets. They reveal the degree of ingenuity and skill of Blackfeet craftsmen in shaping native materials other than skins into useful articles. [121]

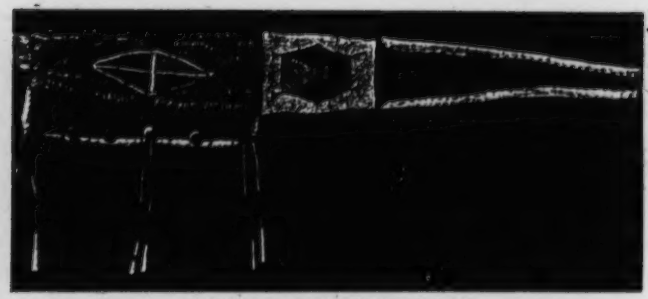
Pottery Making

No specimen of genuine Blackfeet pottery is known to exist. Nevertheless, there is a considerable body of traditional evidence to indicate that these people formerly made crude earthen cooking pots. Each one was encased in a laced rawhide container and secured on top of a horse's pack for protection when travelling. The vessels were fragile and were replaced by unbreakable metal trade kettles at an early date. Very little Backfeet pottery has been made for more than a century. Although no Blackfeet now living has observed the process firsthand, several of the older Indians have heard descriptions of the methods employed from members of their tribes who [323] [415] [439] [178]

[P.55-B]

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 56B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6



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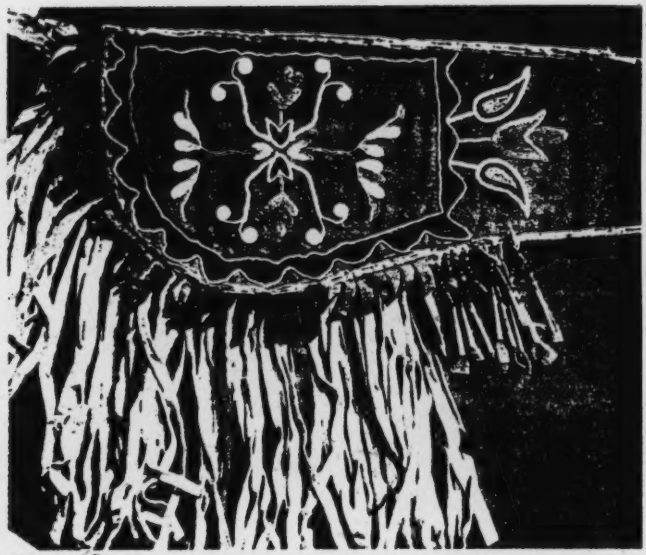
[P55-C]

48. Beaded horse stopper (old style, geometric design).



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[P.56-A]

63. Beaded horse crupper (more recent style, floral design).

were old people fifty or more years ago. According to these descriptions the vessels usually were made of wet, sticky clay tempered with sand or pulverized rock. They were either shaped with the hands or molded inside or around a stiff rawhide mold. Then they were dried in the sun, rubbed all over with fat and hardened beside or over a fire. The cooking vessel was cylindrical in shape, flat bottomed, with two holes on opposite sides near the rim for the attachment of a rawhide or sinew handle. The vessel was probably suspended over the fire from a tripod by means of a long wooden hook supporting the handle. The cooking vessel probably had a capacity of at least two gallons. There is some evidence that a flat pottery serving dish, and a straight sided, ceremonial serving beaker were also made. Women were generally the potters among the Blackfeet, although the ceremonial vessel was said to have been fashioned by a man. Blackfeet pottery was heavy, thick, undecorated, and certainly very crude in comparison with that made by the Mandan and neighboring village tribes on the Missouri.

323 [237] 323 415 [252] [237] [417] 323 [462] [171]

Tobacco Pipe Making

The typical Blackfeet tobacco pipe in the days before they obtained metal tools is believed to have been a hollow tube of clay or stone in one end of which a short, straight wooden stem was inserted. However, since the early years of the nineteenth century, a

276 324 [412]

[P.56-B]

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64. Beaded double saddle bag.

more elaborate form of stone pipe has been made with the aid of metal tools. It is known as the "real pipe." The stone most commonly used was a grayish, calcareous shale quarried from several sites beside the eastward flowing rivers of the Blackfeet country. The Piegan claim that the site longest used by their people is a cliff overlooking the Two Medicine River, about two miles above its junction with Badger Creek, on their Montana reservation. They refer to the site as Pipestone Cliff.

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(412)
316

In making a pipe a block of stone about

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412

[P.57-A]

three or four inches square and an inch and a half thick was selected. On one flat side the desired outline of the pipe was marked out with a sharp piece of metal (more recently with a pencil), and the desired location of the bowl and stem holes also were marked. Then these holes were drilled. In the old days the drilling was begun with a metal tool about six inches long and as thick as a lead pencil. The working end was flattened and shaped much like a sharp edged screwdriver. The holes were drilled by turning this tool back and forth by hand. The inside of the bowl was then enlarged with a second metal tool similar to the drill except that the working end was rounded and expanded. After the holes were completed the outside was shaped with a file or a more primitive tool of hoop iron with holes punched in it to make a simple rasp. The surface was finished with a knife and smoothed with a piece of sandrock. When the drilling and shaping was completed the pipe was in the form of a large acorn resting on a heavy, blocky base. This form is commonly termed Modified Micmac, since it is a variation of the form of pipe common in the east among the Micmac of Nova Scotia and neighboring tribes. It is possible that this kind of pipe may have been suggested to the Blackfeet by pipes used by Iroquois or other eastern Indians employed by Whites in the early fur trade of the Blackfeet country.

After the Blackfeet "real pipe" was shaped, the next step was to blacken its grayish exterior. A fire of green buck-brush (Symphoricarpus) was built. A stick was fitted into the stem hole, by which the pipe was held in the smoke of the fire, and

65. Steps in the shaping of a stone pipe.

[P-57-B]

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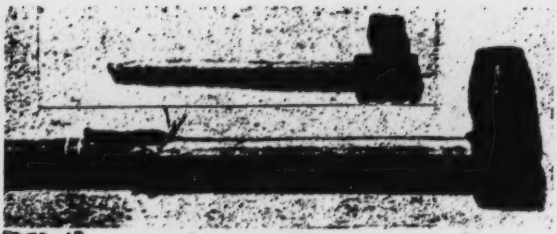
41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6



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[P58-A]

66. Women's pipe upper and men's pipe of blackened stone

turned until it was thoroughly blackened all over. Either before or after it was placed over the fire the surface of the pipe was greased with animal fat. After blackening, it was allowed to cool, then it was polished vigorously with a piece of skin or rag. The finished pipe was a lustrous, shiny black. 276 [237]

It is said that before the Blackfeet had iron-tools they made short pipestems of rosewood by cutting a dry branch lengthwise with a stone knife, digging out the pith with the knife, fitting the two sections together again, glueing them, binding the stem at intervals with sinew, and finally glueing the sinew in place. In more recent times long stems of willow or preferably ash have been used. A piece was cut and allowed to dry partially in the sun. Then it was heated over the fire and bent perfectly straight. 276 824 [412] [283]

The worker took a piece of wire about a yard long that had been heated red hot in the fire. He said a little prayer that the wire might pass straight through the center of the stem, and not burn out the side. Then he made three passes at the end of the stem with the wire, the fourth time he started the wire on its way to burn out the pith and make the stem hole. If the wire burned out at the side and ruined the stem, it was considered very bad luck for the maker. After the stem hole was burned out, the exterior of the stem was sanded smooth with a piece of sand rock. 271 [182] [777] [412]

Pipe making was a specialized craft, in which a few skillful workers excelled. Most

[P. 58-B]

men did not attempt to make pipes but purchased them from one of the well known pipe makers. A finely carved, evenly blackened pipe was worth a good horse. The pipe makers also fashioned smaller bowls for women's use. These were either miniatures of the "real pipes" smoked by men, or shaped in a simple L form.

Pipe making is one of the traditional minor crafts that is still carried on by a number of men. Modern pipe makers now drill holes with a carpenter's drill set in a brace and bit, employ a hacksaw to cut away much of the stone and to save time and labor in shaping the block, and use sandpaper to smooth the surface. Otherwise the process has changed very little over the years. The pipes are used by the Blackfeet themselves in ceremonial smoking and by some Indians for pleasure smoking. They are sold also to interested Whites.

Wooden Bowl Making

The Blackfeet formerly used wooden bowls of their own manufacture for serving and eating food. "Wooden dishes of different dimensions are made of aspen or poplar knots," wrote Alexander Henry of the Piegan in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Older Indians have stated that a woman who wished to make a bowl first located a large burl on an ash or cottonwood tree, cut it off with an axe and carried it back to camp. She began to hollow it out with an axe and finished the inside by

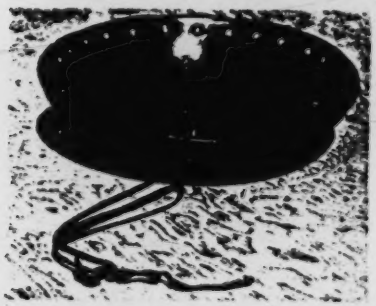
[P.58-C]

carefully removing little chips from the surface with her metal-bladed skin scraping tool. Some workers were satisfied to allow the chipping to show in the finished bowl. Others went over the interior with a sandrock to smooth the surface. The bark was removed from the outside with a knife, and that side also was chipped with the skin scraper by some workers. After the bowl was permitted to dry out in the sun, the entire surface was greased with animal fat. Later the surface was polished to bring out the grain of the wood. Bowls of ash were preferred because of their beautiful grain pattern. Smaller knots were made into cups.

Some wooden bowls are still used in ceremonials, especially in the ritual of the medicine pipe. However, these are generally bowls of White manufacture that have been turned on a lathe. A very rare, old cotton wood bowl, made by an Indian, is shown in figure 67. It is irregular in outline, about three-eighths inches thick, eleven inches in diameter and two and a half inches deep. This bowl is part of a Blood medicine pipe bundle.

Making Horn Spoons

Cups, dishes, ladles and excellent spoons were made by Blackfeet men and women from the horns of the buffalo or the bighorn sheep. David Thompson, the earliest trader to describe the Piegan, stated that



67. Wooden ceremonial bowl.

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48. Spoon of mountain sheep horn.

in the 1780's, small parties were accustomed to travel to the mountain valleys in the fall "to hunt the Big Horn Deer as their horns make fine large bowls and are easily cleaned." 321 224 175

To make a horn spoon, a horn of a buffalo or bighorn was thrown into a fire to fry out the gluey matter. Then it was taken out and, as soon as it was cool enough to handle, it was trimmed with a knife to the desired size and outline of the article for which it was intended. Next the horn was softened in boiling water to make it pliable. A stone of the desired shape was inserted in the bowl, and the handle was bent at the proper angle or arc and weighted down with rocks. The whole spoon was wrapped in skin or cloth until cool. Then the weights were removed, and the properly shaped, rigid spoon was nearly finished. All that remained to be done was to smooth the surface with a sand rock, grease it all over and polish it with the hand until it shone. 321 412

Feather Bonnet Making

The old style feather bonnet of the Blackfeet has a crown of vertical feathers, in contrast with the Dakota type of feather bonnet in which the feathers point upward and backward from the wearer's head. The traditional Blackfeet type is known as the "straight-up bonnet." In former times only acknowledged leaders were privileged to wear it. Headdresses of this type were part 292 [237] [554] [575]

[P-59-B]

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142

69. Straight up feather bonnet.

of the ceremonial paraphernalia of a society of older men known as the Bulls. Other "straight-up bonnets" were known to have had their origin in the dreams of powerful men who therein received instructions to make them. They were worn in ceremonies, on dress occasions, and in war. It took a very brave man to go into battle in a "straight-up bonnet," for his conspicuous headdress made him a marked man, a desirable target for enemy fire. 292 [515] [187] [555]

In making the typical "straight-up bonnet" a piece of thin rawhide was used for the base of the headband, cut to a length equal to that of the wearer's shoulders, and several inches wide. The piece of rawhide was folded on the long dimension. At evenly spaced intervals holes were cut in the rawhide along the fold for the insertion of the feathers. The feathers were cleverly attached to the headband so that the method of attachment was concealed from view after the bonnet was finished. Each feather 294 237 [824]

[P. 60-A]

was inserted in a hole in the fold of rawhide, and a small, willow pin, grooved in the middle, was wedged tightly into the hollow end of the feather for nearly half the length of the pin. The pin was attached to the inner fold of rawhide (the fold that would be nearest the wearer's head) by means of a buckskin cord passed around the groove in the pin, through the rawhide and tied on the other side of the rawhide strip. A second method of attaching feathers to the headband, sometimes preferred, was to cut away about half of the end of the feather, bending the remaining portion back and tucking the end of it into the hollow of the feather. The feather was tied to the headband through the loop thus formed.

After the feathers were secured, the outer surface of the folded rawhide was covered with red flannel and the inner surface (next to the head) with white cloth. The two pieces of material were then sewn together. The band was tied together around the head by two buckskin strings at the back, each string passing through a hole in each end of the band. The headband was deco-

70. Sioux-type feather bonnet (recent Blackfoot style).

[P·60-B]

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[531]
rated with small brass disks sewed to the flannel. The tail feathers of the golden eagle, white with black tips, were preferred for this bonnet and from 18 to 30 were used. Most bonnets were further decorated with porcupine quill-wrapped pieces of thin rawhide sewed to the ribs of the feathers, with short plumes at the bases of the feathers, and with strips of white weasel skin attached to the headband.

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Very few "straight-up bonnets" are now worn. About the year 1895 the Sioux type of bonnet was introduced among the Blackfeet. It has become so popular as to replace the traditional Blackfeet style almost entirely. Elderly Indians say that one important reason why the "straight-up bonnet" rarely is seen today is because it is considered a very sacred thing, and very few people have the right to wear it, whereas the Sioux type of flowing feather bonnet has no such religious meaning to the Blackfeet. It is just a picturesque hat. Anybody can wear it.

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71. Modern sport jackets

[P·61-A]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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72. Modern moccasins decorated with traditional design.

MODERN BLACKFEET CRAFTS

In the first thirty-five years of this century the native crafts of the Blackfeet declined both in quantity and quality. The best examples of Blackfeet handicrafts usually were the articles made as gifts for friends and relatives to use in their native ceremonies and social dances. Some articles were sold to tourists as souvenirs of their visits to the Indian country. The tourist trade was a desultory, unorganized business, and many of the articles bought by uncritical tourists were poorly made, unworthy of the Blackfeet tradition of fine craftsmanship.

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Then in 1936, the Blackfeet Craft Shop was organized, under the sponsorship of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board and the Education Division of the United States Indian Service. Its aim was not only to revive the Blackfeet tradition of expert craftsmanship, but to make craftwork a source of income to the Indians by encouraging greater production, and finding a market for the finished articles among people who appreciate the aesthetic and monetary value

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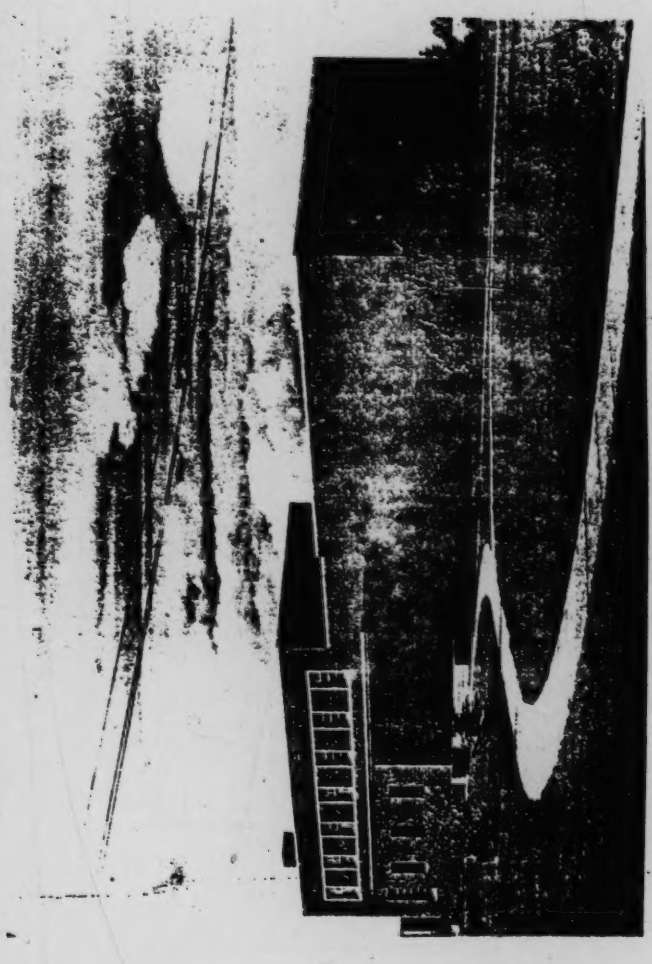

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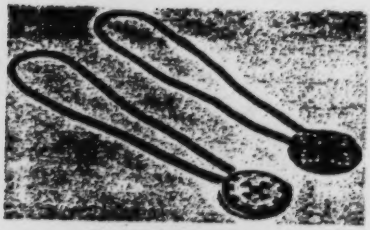

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74. Beaded necklaces (modern).

of well made, genuine, useful Indian handicrafts. 474 [439] [178]

The Blackfeet Craft Shop is a cooperative organization composed of Indian craftsmen and craftswomen living on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. Its governing body is a Council whose members are elected from its general membership. It employs its own Indian business manager. The Craft Shop buys the best raw materials at wholesale for resale to its members at low prices. A Buying Committee of handicraft workers passes upon all articles submitted for sale through this organization and insists upon high standards of workmanship, in keeping with the best traditions of the tribe. For [178] example, all beadwork accepted must be sewn with durable sinew as were the articles made by early Blackfeet. Beaded designs must be in the older tradition of geometric forms, and not in the more recent floral patterns of alien origin. The committee determines both the selling price of each article and the amount the worker is to receive for it. The Blackfeet Craft Shop thus safeguards the purchaser by assuring him genuine, Indian made handicrafts of high quality, worthy of the prices asked for them. On the other hand, it assures the Indian craftsmen and craftswomen of fair returns for their skilled labors.

Modern Blackfeet craftsmen are not engaged in making mere souvenirs. They are making beautiful articles that anyone will be proud to own and to use. Among their most popular articles are attractively 433 441 178

[P·63-A]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
NF6 Blackfoot NF6

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73. Modern coin purse and cigarette case.

tailored sports jackets in either Indian-tanned buckskin or commercial suede. The jackets are made in two different styles, both decorated with beadwork. Other popular articles are moccasins of soft tanned skin beaded with old Blackfeet designs, buckskin gloves, women's sport hats, beaded buckskin or suede coin purses, cigarette cases, playing card cases, and dolls dressed in traditional Blackfeet costumes. Blackfeet craftsmen also make a few traditional articles such as stone pipes, rawhide covered drums, and feather bonnets, which are of special interest to the collector.

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[531]
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These articles are marketed through the retail store owned and operated by the Blackfeet Craft Shop on the Park Highway near the St. Mary's entrance to Glacier National Park. They are sold retail and

444
474

76. Corner of the craft sales room in the museum.

[P·63-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945
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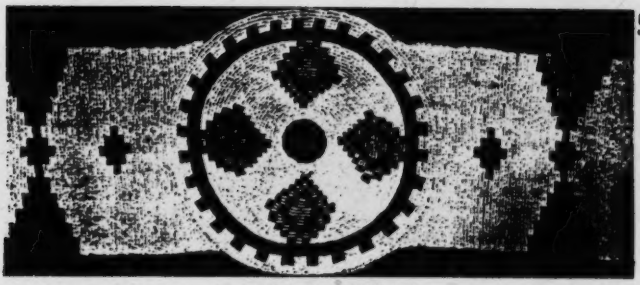
wholesale through the Northern Plains Indians Crafts Association, located at the Museum of the Plains Indian on the Blackfeet Reservation at Browning. The Blackfeet Craft Shop is a charter member of the latter organization, which also markets handicraft made by Indians of the other reservations in Montana and Wyoming. 474 444 000

This modern program has served to stimulate Blackfeet pride in artistic accomplishment. It is enabling them to preserve and develop traditions of expert craftsmanship that were old when the first White men entered the Blackfeet country

[P.64-A]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6



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77. Section of a beaded blanket band.

[P·64-B]

41: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1944) 1945 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

SELECTED READINGS IN BLACKFEET ARTS AND CRAFTS

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NOTE: The student will find helpful supplementary reading in these publications. Those of value for their illustrations as well as their texts are marked by an asterisk.

Bradley, James H.
Characteristics, Habits and Customs of the Blackfeet Indians.
Montana Historical Society Contributions. Vol. 9, Helena, 1923.
Written before 1876, this article contains the earliest certain reference to Blackfeet pottery on page 257.

*Catlin, George
Illustrations of the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians.
Vols. I-II. London, 1841.
Vol. I Contains descriptions and illustrations of the Blackfeet as seen by the artist, Catlin, at Fort Union in 1832.

*Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado. Department of Indian Art.
Leaflet No. 73-74. **Plains Beads and Beadwork Designs.**

Leaflet No. 77-78. **Parfleches and Other Rawhide Articles.**

Leaflet No. 103. **Porcupine Quillwork.**
These little leaflets contain concise general information of value for comparison with the arts and crafts of other tribes.

*Douglas, F. H. and d'Harancourt, Rene
Indian Art of the United States.
The Museum of Modern Art. New York City, 1941.
Contains a well illustrated chapter on the art of the Plains Indians.

*Ewers, John C.
Plains Indian Painting.
Stanford University Press, Stanford University, California, 1939.
Blackfeet painting may be compared with that of other Plains Indian tribes.

*Grinnell, George Bird
The Lodges of the Blackfeet.
American Anthropologist. Vol. I. pp. 650-668. 1899.
An illustrated description of a number of painted lodges.

The Butterfly and the Spider Among the Blackfeet.
American Anthropologist. Vol. I. pp. 194-6 1899.
A brief description of the use of these symbols in Blackfeet art.

Henry, Alexander and Thompson, David
New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest.
Ed. by Elliott Coues. Three Vols. New York, 1897.
Fur trader Henry wrote the best description of Blackfeet life at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

*Kane, Paul
Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America.
London, 1859.
Includes a description and illustrations of the Blackfeet as seen by the artist, Kane, in Canada in the 1840's.

*Kroeber, A. L.
Ethnology of the Gros Ventre.
Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, New York City. Vol. I. Contains a valuable comparison of designs employed in arts and crafts by the tribes of the Northern Plains.

*Lyford, Carrie A.
Quill and Beadwork of the Western Sioux.
pp. 141-282. 1908.
Indian Handcraft Pamphlets. No. 1. U. S. Office of Indian Affairs. 1940. This profusely illustrated booklet is valuable for comparison with Blackfeet Arts and Crafts.

*Linderman, Frank B.
Blackfeet Indians.
The Great Northern Railway, St. Paul, 1935.
Of particular interest are the many portraits of Blackfeet Indians in costume, in full color, by Winold Reiss.

*McClintock, Walter.
The Old North Trail.
Macmillan & Co., London, 1910.
One of the most readable books on the Blackfeet, of particular value for its many early photographs of painted lodges.

Painted Tipis and Picture-Writing of the Blackfeet Indians.
Leaflets, the Southwest Museum. Los Angeles, California. No. 6. 1936.
Profusely illustrated with old photographs.

The Thunderbird Motive in Blackfeet Art.
The Masterkey. The Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California. Vol. XV. No. 4. pp. 129-134. 1941.
Particular reference to its use in lodge painting.

*McLean, John
Picture-Writing of the Blackfeet.
Transactions of the Royal Canadian Institute. Vol. V. pp. 114-20. Toronto, 1898.
A brief description of Blackfeet picture-writing.

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*Mallery, Garrick.
Picture-writing of the American Indians.
Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology. pp. 5-807. Washington, D. C. 1893.
An encyclopaedic work on the picture-writing of all sections of North America, profusely illustrated.

*Maximilian, Alexander Phillip (Prince of Wied-Neuwied).
Travels in the Interior of North America.
Vol. I-II. and Folio. London, 1843.
The most complete early description of Blackfeet arts and crafts (1833). The accompanying illustrations by the Swiss artist, Karl Bodmer, are outstanding.

*Orchard, William C.
Beads and Beadwork of the American Indians.
Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. New York City, Contributions, Vol. II. 1929.
Deals only with bead types and techniques.

The Technique of Porcupine-Quill Decoration Among the North American Indians.
Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. New York City. Contributions, Vol. IV. 1916.
The most comprehensive treatment of the subject. Now out of print.

Spier, Leslie.
An Analysis of Plains Indian Parfleche Decoration.
University of Washington Publications in Anthropology. Vol. I. pp. 89-112. Seattle, 1925.

***Plains Indian Parfleche Designs.**
University of Washington Publications in Anthropology. Vol. IV. No. 3. pp. 293-322. 1931.
Description and illustrations of designs painted on parfleches by Indians of the Plains and Northwest.

Thompson, David
David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America.
Edited by J. B. Tyrrell.
Champlain Society Publications. No. 12. Toronto, 1916.
Contains a few references to Piegan arts and crafts before 1800.

*Vaillant, George C.
Indian Arts in North America.
Harpers. New York, 1939.
Contains a chapter on the Plains Indian tribes, with full-page photographs.

*Wissler, Clark
Decorative Art of the Sioux Indians.
Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Vol. XVIII. Part 3. pp. 231-278. 1904.
In addition to a thorough, illustrated account of Sioux arts and crafts, this paper contains a two page Appendix on Blackfeet decorative art.

Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians.
Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Vol. V. Part I. 1910.
Indispensable for an understanding of the construction of Blackfeet material objects.

The Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians.
Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Vol. VII. Part I. 1911.
Contains a discussion of Blackfeet picture-writing.

Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians.
Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Vol. VII. Part 2. 1912.
Information on feather bonnets, men's suits, shields and painted lodges with emphasis upon their religious significance.

Costumes of the Plains Indians.
Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Vol. XVII. Part 2. 1915.
On methods of construction and tribal styles.

Structural Basis in the Decoration of Costume Among the Plains Indians.
Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Vol. XVII. Part 3. 1916.
Points out the influence of garment structure on decoration.

Distribution of Moccasin Decorations Among the Plains Tribes.
Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Vol. XXIX. Part 1. 1927.
A study of the tribal distribution of moccasin designs in an effort to trace their history.

North American Indians of the Plains.
American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Handbook Series No. 1. Third Edition. 1934.
A popular guidebook based on extensive technical studies.
There is one chapter devoted to Decorative Art.

Wissler, Clark and Duvall, D. C.
Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians.
Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History. New York City. Part I. 1909.
In the myth of the Twin Brothers there is a brief description of old time Blackfeet pottery making. (p. 43).

41: Ewers

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[For information on male-female differences in painting styles, see Categories 531 and 532, pp. 15-B--16-A, 19-B--20-B.]

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[For information on painted lodge-skin covers and their designs as sacred objects, see Category 531, pp. 24-B--27-B.]